Travel
Summertime in the alluring ancient city of Kiev

Dining
A guide to restaurants in St. Petersburg

JUNE 2011
Vladimir Mikhailov
TOKENS OF FAITH

«MIRACULOUS VICTORY
BY ST. GEORGE OVER THE SNAKE»
Folding seal ring. gold 35, diamonds
Vladimir Michaillov, 2009

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LEISURE:
Leafy havens in which to enjoy the summer sun

TRAVEL:
A guide to the magnificent Ukrainian capital Kiev.

CITY CULTURE:
An independent bookstore liven up the literary community.

RESTAURANTS:
Eateries old and new, plus a section on outdoor terraces.

GIGS:
What to expect from the city’s music scene this summer.

FOOD:
Ginza chef Alexander Belkovich on his voracious appetite.
Both Park Pobedy (pictured) and the Central Park of Culture and Leisure have boating facilities, making it possible to make the most of their expansive lakes.

Piter’s parks

For confirmed urbanites intimidated by the hardships of dacha life, an afternoon in the park may be quite enough nature for one day.

Glorious though the former imperial estates are, from the spectacular manmade splendor of Peterhof to the quiet, rambling nature of Gatchina or Pavlovsk, it is possible to find a picturesque spot of greenery without spending an hour on a cramped, stuffy minibus or overcrowded suburban train. Parks and gardens are scattered all over St. Petersburg, offering a refuge from the traffic and noise of the city’s streets and a perfect place in which to while away a long, lazy summer afternoon. Plus, like the rest of the city, the green spaces in St. Petersburg are all steeped in history.

BOTANICAL GARDEN
2 Ulitsa Professora Popova
Tel: 234 1764. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily except Friday

It is well worth paying the nominal entrance fee to enter the tranquil Botanical Gardens, tucked away in a quiet corner of Aptekarsky Island on the Petrograd Side. The vast, stately greenhouses date back to the 19th century and are home to plants from every corner of the world, while the gardens themselves are far more secluded than most of the city’s parks. The gardens grew out of a herb garden founded on this spot by Peter the Great in 1714, which gave Aptekarsky (Apothecary) Island its name. The Botanical Gardens’ vast and diverse collection includes an impressive

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range of lilies and the legendary Queen of the Night, a rare tropical flower that flowers for one night only — an occasion for which the gardens remain open until midnight.

SMOLNY GARDENS
The orderly gardens laid out in front of the Smolny Institute are as neat and well kept as might be expected of a park located so close to the seat of the city government, making them very pleasant surroundings for a civilized stroll. Their location in the upscale Smolny district also explains the distinct lack of tramps and gangs of youths that are ubiquitous in many of the city’s other parks and gardens. The awe of authority — or at least of the large police presence in the area — does not seemingly extend to the canine world, however: The gardens are home to a pack of wild dogs, incongruously roaming among the majestic fountains and luxuriant lilac bushes of the symmetrical gardens, which were originally laid out in the 1920s and ’30s and are also home to busts of Marx and Engels.

FIELD OF MARS
The large, flat Field of Mars is a favorite oasis with sun-worshippers and cyclists. Despite the relaxed, recreational atmosphere of this former bog, the Field of Mars — so named because it was a military parade ground in the 19th century — has a somber history. The remains of those who died during the February and October revolutions of 1917 lie beneath the turf, a fact that is commemorated by an eternal flame at the center of the field.

TAVRICHESKY GARDEN
The expansive Tavrichesky park contains enough variety within its iron railings to please everyone. There are children’s playgrounds dotted around the park at regular intervals, making it popular with families, while a more secluded area reached by crossing a bridge over a stream is popular with sunbathers. On really hot days, many brave the park’s lake, despite the sign declaring swimming forbidden.

ALEXANDROVSKY GARDEN
The narrow garden in front of the Admiralty was built in 1872 on a former moat and other fortifications that had surrounded the Admiralty for years. While it is not really spacious enough for sunbathing or picnics, the benches encircling the large fountain — itself a popular inner-city cooling off spot — are popular with strollers, as well as with harried office workers who have stolen out for a quick ice-cream in the middle of the day. Busts around the fountain celebrate Russian writers such as Gogol and Lermontov, as well as the composer Glinka, while further toward the Bronze Horseman, Nikolai Przhevalsky is depicted together with a camel in a monument to the 19th-century explorer of Central Asia.

PARK POBEDY (VICTORY PARK)
The sprawling Victory Park in the south of the city is devoted to those who laid down their lives in World War II and the Siege of Leningrad, hence its Heroes’ Avenue. The park is a great place to enjoy a summer’s day by boating on the lake, risking the rusty fairground rides, or simply lazing in the sunshine.

MIKHAILOVSKY GARDENS
There is not much chance of cycling, sunbathing or picnicking on the grass in front of the Mikhailovsky Palace (bikes are banned, the grass is out of bounds and the gardens are patrolled by vigilant watchmen), but the sedate gardens are home to occasional events such as the Imperial Gardens of Russia festival and outdoor concerts.

CENTRAL PARK OF CULTURE AND LEISURE (TSPKO)
Parts of Yelagin Island, which was designated a Central Park of Culture and Leisure in 1932, are about as wild as the parks within the city’s boundaries get, making it a beautiful place in which to relax during the summer. Boat rental and horse rides are available, and the paths of the island are very popular with cyclists and roller-skaters.
The city of Kiev, founded more than 1,500 years ago and the heart of ancient Kievan Rus, is rich with dazzling churches, fascinating folklore and enticing parks and gardens.

The most useful piece of advice for those visiting Kiev for the first time is: “Avoid wearing new shoes.”

The reason is very simple: Kiev, a spectacularly beautiful and enchanting city, is situated on a series of impressive hills, so getting to know the Ukrainian capital requires a great deal of walking.

A second piece of advice is to plan a visit for May, the summer or early fall. May and June are particularly rewarding times to visit Kiev, when the chestnut, cherry and apricot trees are in full bloom, along with delectably fragrant lilac bushes and magnolias.

Kiev, a city that is more than 1,500 years old, is unsurprisingly home to a vast number of historical sights, and deciding what to visit can be difficult. There are, however, some iconic sites that top the list of the average traveler.

HOLIEST OF HOLIES
One of Kiev’s most celebrated treasures is the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (Kiev Monastery of the Caves), a unique monastery complex consisting of a system of underground passages and a number of stunning golden-domed churches. The caves are divided into two parts: The Far and Near Caves.

The caves originally housed the monks, but were later used as a burial site for the founders of the monastery. Most notably, they are home to the remains of Nestor the Chronicler, believed to be the author of the Primary Chronicle, and of the Kievan Rus epic hero Ilya Muromets, as well as the preserved relics of saints.

Hermit monks lived in the underground cells, devoting their lives to prayer. Some of the cave walls bear small holes through which the hermits were brought food and water.

There are many legends about the scope of the monastery’s caves. Some say that the underground passages stretch under Kiev’s main river, the Dnieper, connecting the lavra with other monastery cave sites in Kiev and even in the city of Chernigov, 130 kilometers away.

The monastery is as popular a destination for pilgrims today as it was centuries ago. Travelers come from all over the world to pray to local icons and to collect water from the lavra’s holy spring.

Another must-see is Kiev’s St. Sofia Cathedral. Founded by Yaroslav Mudry (Yaroslav the Wise), Grand Prince of Kiev, in 1037 on the spot where he was victorious over the heathen Pecheneg tribes, St. Sofia became the main church of Kievan Rus. The cathedral was used for coronation ceremonies and for grand princes to receive foreign ambassadors. Later the cathedral became the final resting place for rulers of Kiev.

In the 1930s, the Soviet authorities called for the cathedral’s destruction, in keeping with the regime’s atheist policy. Fortunately, due to the efforts of historians — and possibly some intervention on the part of the French — the cathedral was saved. One version is that it was pointed out that Henry I of France had married Anne of Kiev, the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, and that to avoid risking a scandal, the Soviet authorities decided to spare the cathedral and instead converted the complex into a museum of history and architecture.

The St. Sofia Cathedral is celebrated for its rich mosaics and frescos. The cathedral’s holiest object for more than a hundred years has been its icon of the Blessed Virgin, known as the “inviolable wall.” A centuries-old legend states that Kiev will be kept safe as long as the “inviolable wall” is protected.

ICONS OF INDEPENDENCE
At the center of Sofiyskaya Square is a famed monument to Bohdan Khmelnytsky, one of Ukraine’s most famous leaders, who led the fight for freedom from Polish oppression.
White Nights

Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) and Kiev include its main square Maidan than 5,000 square meters. In good weather, the Pechersk botanical gardens, which cover more than 130 hectares, are one of the most popular destinations for both residents of and visitors to the capital. The collections of magnolias and lilacs have become a symbol not only of the garden, but of Kiev itself.

The park is divided into zones containing vegetation and landscapes typical of the geographic zone represented: The Ukrainian Carpathians, the plain forests, the Ukrainian steppe, the Crimea, the Caucasus, Middle Asia, Altai and Western Siberia and the Far East. The garden is also home to a unique collection of tropical and subtropical plants, including a large array of orchids, contained in greenhouses covering an area of more than 5,000 square meters.

Some of the best known areas of Kiev include its main square Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) and the central avenue of Kreschatyk, as well as Podol, one of the city’s oldest districts, and one of Kiev’s most attractive streets, Andriyivsky Descent.

In ancient times, Andriyivsky Descent was the street that connected Old Kiev (the Upper City) with Podol (the Lower City).

Andriyivsky Descent is known as Kiev’s Montmartre, due to the multitude of picture galleries along the street and the throngs of painters, musicians and artists who come here every day. The street is a good place to buy Ukrainian souvenirs such as embroidered clothes and painted plates and dishes.

**REMEMBERING THE WAR**

Kiev has a wealth of museums that are worth visiting, but some of the finest collections are displayed in the museum devoted to World War II. The exposition focuses on subject areas including the Sevastopol defense, the Nazi occupation and concentration camps, the Ukrainian partisan movement and the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk. One of the most moving sections is the Memory Chamber, which features a 27-meter-long funeral table covered with personal belongings, embroidered towels and “killed in battle” notices.

For children — and male visitors — the main attraction may be the outdoor part of the museum, which boasts a rich collection of both old and more recent military vehicles such as tanks, planes and helicopters. Visitors can sit behind the controls of fighter planes and climb on top of tanks.

The centerpiece of the outdoor area of the museum is the Motherland sculpture — a huge 62-meter statue of a female figure holding a sword in one hand, and a shield bearing the coat of arms of the Soviet Union in the other.

**FOOD**

It goes without saying that sampling some traditional Ukrainian borsch is an essential experience when visiting the country. Another must is Ukrainian varenniki — stuffed dumplings that come with a wide variety of savory or sweet fillings such as cabbage, cottage cheese, meat or even buckwheat. One of the most popular variants is varenniki with cherries.

Zhivchik is a locally made lemonade that is popular with kids, and has the bonus of being considered healthier than other fizzy drinks due to the addition of Echinacea extract. Zhivchik comes in lemon, apple and pear flavors.

Ice-cream lovers should be sure to sample kashtan (chestnut) ice-cream, while boxes of Vecherny come in lemon, apple and pear flavors.

**WHERE TO STAY**

A good place to stay in terms of price and location is the Rus Hotel Complex at 4 Hospitalnaya Ulitsa. Rooms cost from $80. Another good option is hotel Ukraina Complex at 4 Gospitalnaya Ulitsa. Rooms cost around $100. A standard room costs about $100. The President and Lybid hotels are also worth checking out.

**DINING**

An agreeable and inexpensive local restaurant serving national Ukrainian cuisine is Shvyrin, located at 28 Ulitsa Khoriva in the Podil district. Another commendable eatery is Yaroslava, which offers delectable pirozhki (pies), at 13 Yaroslavov Val. A more upscale option for sampling the delights of Ukrainian food is the restaurant Shvyrin located at 28 Ulitsa Lesi Ukrainki.
Lyubov Belyatskaya, owner of Vse Svobody, says she had always wanted to see an independent store selling rare literature in the city, and eventually decided to set up such a store herself.

A new bookstore offers ‘intellectual literature non-stop’ to customers who care more about a book’s sentimental value than its current popularity. Those who can find the place are richly rewarded with a vast selection of books — and exotic teas.

“Getting a bank loan was easy,” she said. “It was harder to find a location that was centrally located and wasn’t too costly. I don’t think it matters that we’re not visible from the main streets — we don’t compete with any of the other bookshops anyway,” she added.

The underlying idea of Vse Svobodny is to provide people with intellectual literature that is hard to obtain elsewhere. Books that have not been on sale at commercial bookstores for years can still be found here in this labyrinthine store, the idea being that some books are too important to be out of stock.

“I have a lot of friends helping me with the selection, and we all choose books out of personal interest,” said Belyatskaya, adding that she is absolutely positive that St. Petersburg needs an addition to the already vast realm of bookstores.

“St. Petersburg is Russia’s cultural capital and has a large market. Of course there is a need for a shop with an intellectual approach. If nothing else, I need such a shop myself,” she smiles.
Eating out
An independent overview of St. Petersburg’s dining scene.

**BALTICA BREW**
3-5 Bolshaya Morskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 921 0912.
11 a.m. until the last customer leaves.
Baltika Brew enjoys a peerless location next to Palace Square, but inside there is still some fine-tuning to be done. The food, which includes Indian cuisine and pub snacks, ranges from excellent to fatty and forgettable, and the service is friendly but somewhat hapless.

**BARBARESCO**
2 Konyushennaya Ploshchad.
Tel: 647 8282. 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. weekdays, 10 a.m. to 6 a.m. weekends.
Barbaresco, serving Italian and European dishes that are on the whole very good, is another addition to the streak of trendy new bar-cum-restaurants on Konyushennaya Ploshchad. The restaurant claims Gerard Depardieu is a frequent customer.

**CAVIAR BAR**
Angleterre Hotel. 24 Malaya Morskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 494 5061.
Noon to 2 a.m.
The vast, arching windows of Caviar Bar provide a spectacular view of St. Isaac’s Cathedral. You should be warned, however: Unless you are an oil tycoon and/or a local bureaucrat, this isn’t the ideal place to head to for a cheap lunchtime snack. Choose from four types of caviar, served with traditional blinis.

**CÔTÉ JARDIN**
3a Ulitsa Mayakovskogo.
Tel: 335 1188.
6.30 a.m. to 11 p.m.
A stylish Mediterranean restaurant in the central Novotel St. Petersburg Center hotel. There is a business buffet every weekday lunchtime, but its main selling point is the homemade pastries from the in-house deli.

**DAVIDOV**
39 Bolsyaya Morskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 494 5815.
7 a.m. to midnight.
Not cheap, but nevertheless one of the top fine dining experiences to be had in the city. Its elegant Style Moderne interior, fantastic location overlooking St. Isaac’s Square and the fascinating history of the building itself (it’s housed within the historic Astoria Hotel) are also major advantages.

**DOLCE AMARO**
10 Ulitsa Barochnaya.
Tel: 380 8040.
Noon to 11 p.m.
A visit to this part of the Petrograd Side will be more than rewarded by the delectable Italian classics served up at Dolce Amaro. There is no pizza on the menu, and nor is it necessary.

**DOM BYTA**
12 Razrezhaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 975 5599.
Noon to 6 a.m.
During the daytime, Dom Byta functions as a chilled-out café, but by night it hosts all-night parties popular with the city’s movers and shakers. Drinks are frighteningly expensive, but the excellent food, which includes dishes from India, Mexico and Thailand, is fortunately more democratically priced.

**FERMA**
4 Pereulok Grivtsova.
Tel: 448 2277.
Noon to midnight.
The same restaurant group that gave the city Stroganoff Steak House has now created a seafood cousin. The large fish-based menu features soups and a large variety of fish and shellfish dishes. There is a good wine list and very helpful English-speaking wait staff.

**FISH HOUSE**
1 Finlyandsky Prospekt.
Tel: 542 8866.
Mon to Fri 11 p.m. to 12 a.m.
Sat, Sun 11 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Ferma (farm) does not take its name lightly; it is ‘rustic’ to the extreme. The menu is a hybrid of French, Russian and Italian dishes, including excellent pizzas. Both the service and food here are impressive, and despite its location on the Vyborg Side, this restaurant comes highly recommended.

**TIMUR TURGUNOV**
Eating out
An independent overview of St. Petersburg’s dining scene.

Barbaresco, a newcomer on the city’s dining scene, has a stylishly cluttered interior and equally appealing balcony level. Bodyguards, however, must be left outside.
Alfresco Dining

What follows is a brief overview of restaurants with summer terraces — from simple sidewalk seating to rooftop gardens, from patios in the courtyard to floating restaurants on the Neva.

**GRAND HOTEL EUROPE**
Corner of Nevsky Prospekt and Mikhailovsky Ulitsa. Tel: 329 6628
The Grand Hotel Europe’s summer terrace is surely one of the best places in the city for watching the world go by.

**JAMES COOK**
2 Shvedsky Pereulok. Tel: 312 3200
Situated at the end of the pedestrianized Malaya Konyushennaya Ulitsa, the outdoor seating area of this upscale café-bar is a pleasant place in which to while away the White Nights.

**TEPLO**
45 Bolshaya Morskaya Ulitsa
Tel: 570 1974
The tables in Teplo’s courtyard, which in summer is decorated with a glorious jungle of plants and flowers, are unsurprisingly wildly popular on warm days.

**RENAISSANCE ST. PETERSBURG BALTIC HOTEL**
4 Pochtamtskaya Ulitsa. Tel: 380 40 00
The sixth-floor terrace at this hotel offers superb views of St. Isaac’s Cathedral and its surroundings.

**RENAISSANCE ST. PETERSBURG HOTEL**
45 Bolshaya Morskaya Ulitsa
Tel: 314 3849.

**OCEAN**
14a Prospekt Dobrolyubova
Tel: 717 1270. Noon to midnight.
This floating fusion restaurant-bar moored near the Birzhevoi bridge has an open deck.

**GOGOL**
77 Nab. Reki Fontanki. Tel: 310 0689, 310 5280. Noon to midnight.
This stylish and tastefully decorated French eatery is a delight. The simple menu of classic Gallic dishes does not disappoint and is complemented by an equally impressive wine list. The service is attentive.

**MANSARDA**
166 Nevsky Prospekt. Tel: 719 6542. Noon to midnight Sun – Thurs, noon to 3 a.m at weekends.
A delightful loopy café with some weird and wonderful furnishings serving a range of international dishes rarely found in St. Petersburg, including excellent hummus, as well as outstanding Caucasian cuisine. The service is however somewhat hit-and-miss.

**KOMPT**
10 Ulitsa Zhukovskogo.
Tel: 719 6542. Noon to midnight Sun – Thurs, noon to 3 a.m at weekends.
A delightful loopy café with some weird and wonderful furnishings serving a range of international dishes rarely found in St. Petersburg, including excellent hummus, as well as outstanding Caucasian cuisine. The service is however somewhat hit-and-miss.

**SACRA NO. 55**
36 Saya Liniya Vasilyevsky Island.
Tel: 322 7444. 9 a.m. till 6 a.m.
If the name Kvartira (Apartment) No. 55 leads you to expect a converted communal apartment packed with Soviet kitsch, have no fear: Understatement — to the point of extreme — is the byword at this modestly upscale wine bar. Both the traditional Russian cuisine and the European dishes are generally excellent.

**KUHO**
2 Shvedsky Pereulok. Tel: 572-38-34
This stylish and tastefully decorated French eatery is a delight. The simple menu of classic Gallic dishes does not disappoint and is complemented by an equally impressive wine list. The service is attentive.

**MOPS**
12 Ulitsa Rubinsteina. Tel: 572-38-34
The sidewalk terrace of this elegant Thai restaurant is in fact a permanent glass extension — good for chilly or wet days.

**SCHASTYE**
15 Ulitsa Rubinsteina. Tel: 572 2675
Cherubin-themed Schastye (Happiness), which serves European cuisine, has a very pleasant wooden sidewalk terrace.

**FRANSMANNI**
3a Bataisky Pereulok. Tel: 335 2270.
This popular restaurant serving divine Caucasian fare has a small terrace on the sidewalk next to Dom Kino.

**FRANCESCO**
47 Suvorovsky Prospekt. Tel: 275 0552.
Noon to midnight.
An impeccable two-story restaurant with a pleasantly cluttered interior and cheerful, chattering clientele. Everything at Francesco is laudably fresh, and prices at this Ginza Project establishment range from reasonable to redoubtable. There is a popular outdoor terrace in the summer.

**GAVROCHE**
166 Nevsky Prospekt. Tel: 717 1270. Noon to midnight.
Not quite its London-based namesake, this French bistro offers authentic French food with swift, helpful service in a relaxing atmosphere and, unusually, a good range of delicious desserts. The menu is complemented by a decent wine list.

**GOGOL**
8 Malaya Morskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 312 6097. Noon to midnight.
Given its prime location just off Nevsky on the mini-hotel-peppered Malaya Morskaya Ulitsa, Gogol looks set to reel in the tourists, and deservedly so. Everything about the restaurant oozes quality, and the traditional Russian dishes themselves match the high standards set by the interior and service.

**MANSARDA**
44 5aya Sovietskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 948 0099. Daily from noon until the last customer leaves.
Located on a dim corner across from the Chernyshovsky Gardens, Laplandia’s interior is an all-wood affair resembling an enormous dacha or banya. The leather-and-fur-bound menu is divided into Lapland and Scandinavia halves, each with enough variety and substance to serve as stand-alone offerings, though on neither side do vegetables feature prominently.

**STROGANOFF STEAK HOUSE**
4 Konnogvardeisky Boulevard
Tel: 314 5514
The city’s steak empire opened its sidewalk terrace on the leafy Konnogvardeisky Boulevard for the first time this year.

**LAPLANDIA**
3a Suvorovsky Prospekt. Tel: 275 0552.
This top-floor restaurant stretches around the fourth serves as an open-air terrace in the summer.

**GASTRONOM**
1/7 Naberezhnaya Reki Moiki.
Tel: 314 3849.

**FOR SPT**
44 5aya Sovietskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 319 3762. 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

**MASSMIDIYA**
39a Zagorodny Prospetsk.
Tel: 319 3762. 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.
This Belgian restaurant has an original menu and prompt service. The name is a play on the Russian word for mussels, which unsurprisingly feature heavily in a variety of guises and will not disappoint.

METAMORFOS
Radisson Sonya Hotel.
5/19 Liteiny Prospekt.
Tel: 406 0006. Noon to midnight.
This is an unostentatiously elegant Dostoevsky-themed restaurant. Along with the customary Russian starters, soups and main dishes, a wide range of pasta and grilled dishes are available. It is one of St. Petersburg’s few restaurants with full wheelchair access.

MIX IN ST. PETERSBURG
6 Voznesensky Prospekt. Tel: 610 6161
The restaurant of the newly opened W hotel operates under the name of top flight chef Alain Ducasse. The portions here are modest, but the European cuisine served up is simply spectacular.

O’CUBA
36 Ulitsa Rubinshteina. Tel: 312 8892.
12 p.m. until the last customer leaves.
O’Cuba is a Cuban concept restaurant that truly captures the essence of post-revolutionary Havana. The restaurant’s centerpiece and king table is a powder blue ’56 Buick Special Convertible. While the appetizers are good, the entrees don’t quite measure up, and money is best spent on the appetizers, drinks and cigars.

PORTOBELLO
12a Zagorodny Prospekt.
Tel: 915 5501. 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.
With attentive wait staff, a relaxed atmosphere, simple yet chic décor and an extensive menu offering a variety of classic Italian dishes, the owners of the old-standing favorite Da Albertone on Millionaya Ulitsa have come up with another winner. Although the dishes are simple, each is perfectly executed.

PRAVILA POVEDENIYA
(THREE RULS OF BEHAVIOR)
38 Ulitsa Rubinshteina.
Tel: 956 4842. Noon to midnight
This is an intriguing sci-fi themed restaurant with wait staff seemingly dressed as characters from the film The Fifth Element. However, the food is hard to fault and reasonably priced, and the homemade pasta comes highly recommended.

RUSSIAN VODKA ROOM NO. 1
4 Konnogvardeisky Boulevard.
Tel: 570 6422. Open noon through midnight.
From the people responsible for the excellent Stroganoff Steak House just up the road, this restaurant-and-vodka-museum in one is brilliant at giving newcomers to the city an (expensive) introduction to Russian cuisine.

SOUP AND WINE
24 Kazanskaya Ulitsa.
Tel: 312 7690. Noon to midnight.
This small, convenient and reasonably priced eatery is ideal for a light lunch. The food is good but the selection isn’t huge. The assortment of snacks and light meals are perfect fuel for a busy day’s sightseeing or afternoon’s work.

ST. PETERSBURG RESTAURANT
5 Nab. Kanala Griboyedova.
Tel: 314 4947. Noon to midnight.
An upscale restaurant in the historic heart of the city. It serves a varied combination of European and Russian dishes from its location across the canal from Church on the Spilled Blood. The service is impressive and they stock a comprehensive wine cellar.

STROGANOFF STEAK HOUSE
4 Konnogvardeisky Boulevard.
Tel: 314 5514. Noon to midnight.
This spacious and comfortable restaurant is a mainstay of the St. Petersburg restaurant scene, offering an unsurprisingly meat-based menu. It’s not cheap, but the Stroganoff burger and large range of steaks are highly commendable.

TANDOOR
2 Voznesensky Prospekt.
Tel: 312 3886, 312 5310. Noon to 11 p.m.
Tandoor offers a comprehensive range of delicacies from the subcontinent in a pleasantly kitsch setting, with very friendly service. It’s not the cheapest, but it’s worth every kopeck. The business lunch comes highly recommended.

TERRASSA
3 Kazanskaya Ulitsa. Tel. 937 6837, 610 6837, delivery 941 4224.
Mon – Wed 11 p.m. to 12 a.m. Thu – Fri 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sat noon to 1 a.m. Sun noon to 12 p.m.
This rooftop restaurant on the top floor of the former Vanity fashion boutique offers an Asian-fusion menu. It may be overpriced, but this place is more about style than substance, with great views of the city’s skyline.

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VESNA
2 Konushennaya Ploschad.
Tel: 913 4545. 11 a.m. to midnight (2 a.m. at weekends).
Located in the newly-renovated imperial stables near the Avrora cruiser, Vesna brings new life to the often precarious world of fusion dining. Combining European, Russian and Asian cuisine with an intimate atmosphere, Vesna is one of the hottest joints in town.

VOLGA-VOLGA
Petrovskaya Naberezhnaya, opposite building no.8, near the Avrora cruiser.
Tel: 900 8338. 24 hours.
The cuisine at this glamorous floating restaurant moored near the Avrora cruiser is best described as fusion with an emphasis on seafood. Though expensive, the dishes are delicately and exquisitely prepared. The restaurant also offers cruises along the Neva.

ZHELANIYA
23 Prospekt Dobrylyubova.
Tel: 232 9883. Midday until 11 p.m.
The homey ambiance at Zhelaniya, which means “wishes,” can be felt straight away: Zhelaniya is a very warm place in every sense of the world, from genial service to good heating. The continental menu is innovative and admirable — the broccoli puree is a heavenly concoction that deserves special mention.
Fronted by Ukraine-born Eugene Hutz, Gogol Bordello is a combination of gypsy folk, Brechtian cabaret and punk. The New York band, whose most recent album was last year’s “Trans-Continental Hustle,” is a motley crew of players from different parts of the world. Its most recent feats include performing at WOMAD and opening for System of a Down.

American alternative metal band Slipknot from Des Moines, Iowa is notorious for its sinister masks, aggressive performances and the fact that several murderers have cited it as an inspiration. Reformed after the death of cofounding member Paul Gray last year, the nine-member act is embarking on a tour of which the band’s singer Corey Taylor has said, “If this tour doesn’t work, Slipknot might be over.”

California rockers Papa Roach have performed their mix of alternative metal, hip-hop and rock since the early 1990s. Formed in Vacaville, the band has sold more than eight million album copies worldwide starting with its triple-platinum album “Infest” in 2000. Its most recent offering was a live album called “Time for Annihilation” last year.

Irish singer/songwriter Sinead O’Connor, whose smash-hit cover of Prince’s “Nothing Compares 2 U” was on the air for years, has written dozens of worthwhile alt-pop songs of her own throughout her 25-year career. Now 46, O’Connor, known for her bold statements and gestures dealing with politics, religion and sexuality, comes to St. Petersburg for the first time.

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JULY 1 | GOGOL BORDELLO
Kosmonavt

JUNE 22 | PAPA ROACH
Kosmonavt

JULY 10 | IRON MAIDEN
Peterburgsky Sports and Concert Complex (SKK)

JUNE 23 | DURAN DURAN
Ice Palace

Reformed in 2009 as a quartet with original members Simon Le Bon, Nick Rhodes, John Taylor and Roger Taylor, Duran Duran has been delivering excellent pop songs since forming in Birmingham in 1978. The band is named after a villain from “Barbarella,” Roger Vadim’s 1968 psychedelic sci-fi film starring Jane Fonda.

JUNE 26 | SINEAD O’CONNOR
Glavclub

Robert Plant once fronted one of rock’s greatest and most influential bands ever, Led Zeppelin sadly folded when drummer John Bonham died in 1980, but at 62, Plant appears to be fairly fit, touring and recording with the Band of Joy that he formed last year. At recent concerts, he performed songs including “Black Dog,” “Gallows Pole” and “Ramble On.”

JULY 13 | THIRTY SECONDS TO MARS
Telebashnya Stadium

Fronted by film actor Jared Leto (“Requiem for a Dream”), pictured (center), Thirty Seconds to Mars started as a small family enterprise when formed by Leto and his brother Shannon in Los Angeles in 1998. It has sold more than 3.5 million albums worldwide since then. The alternative metal band describes its newest album, “This Is War,” as a “commentary on global crises and economic turmoil.” Thirty Seconds to Mars will be supported by the British rock band Stunk Ananse, which reformed in 2009 after an eight-year hiatus.

JUNE 27 | ROBERT PLANT
Ice Palace

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JUNE 29 | CAVALERA CONSPIRACY
Glavclub

Formed from the ashes of thrash metal groups Sepultura and Soulfly by Brazilian brothers Max and Igor Cavalera, Cavalera Conspiracy describes itself as “unleashed” and “explosive.” The band is on tour in support of “Blunt Force Trauma,” its second studio album released earlier this year.

JULY 25 / JULY 2 | STEREOLETO
Vozduh Project, Krestovsky Ostrov

Now marking its 10th anniversary, St. Petersburg’s major summer music event will be split into two dates. Mumi Troll frontman Ilya Lagutenko’s electronic project Keta will headline the first, while the second will feature Germany’s Apparat Band, Austria’s Architecture in Helsinki (pictured), Finland’s Uusi Fantasia and Norway’s Casuixids.

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Cooking up a storm

BY GALINA STOLYAROVA / THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

When Alexander Belkovich, brand chef for Ginza Project restaurants in St. Petersburg, travels to another town or city, whether for business or on holiday, he goes straight to the local market. That is how he starts getting to know any new place. When the 26-year-old visits his friends’ dachas, he makes a beeline for the blackcurrant bushes to wolf down what is growing there. In short, Belkovich experiences life through his tastebuds.

Young, blond, muscular, curious and laid-back, Belkovich bears a striking resemblance to Britain’s most popular chef, Jamie Oliver, the host of hugely popular TV shows and author of bestselling cookery books. A glance at the Russian chef’s first cookbook, published this spring, reveals that the two chefs share a philosophy of choosing simple and easily accessible ingredients: “Cooking is as simple as lacing up your trainers: you cannot be incapable of doing it,” says Belkovich, whose recipe for chicken cutlets with gooseberry sauce has made him highly popular with local gourmands. “I can just sense what sort of dish is likely to be popular,” says Belkovich. This bold statement may sound a little immodest, but the fully booked restaurants of the Ginza Project group — which include Francesco, Mansarda, Terrassa, Tsar and Moskva — prove him right.

Belkovich’s first experiments in the field of gastronomy date back to his early teens: His sausage sandwiches made with rye bread were a hit with his local swimming team in his home town of Severodvinsk in the Arkhangelsk Oblast. His sausage sandwiches made with rye bread were a hit with his local swimming team in his home town of Severodvinsk in the Arkhangelsk Oblast.

Belkovich’s circle of clientele is broad enough to include members of royal families and heads of states. In February, Mansarda restaurant hosted a lunch for President Dmitry Medvedev and Juan Carlos I of Spain. “We did not close the restaurant for ordinary customers that day, and absolutely anyone could come in and have a meal,” Belkovich said. “In fact, there was no extra super security regime. I can tell you that the security required sometimes for a member of the local parliament creates far more hassle than the presidential security requirements.

Of course, the menu was agreed in advance. On the day of the president’s lunch, we had a visit from the security services. A nice, cheerful-looking bloke entered the kitchen, gave us a bottle of vodka and told us to get another one to wipe all the kitchenware with. And then he said, ‘Right, guys, I’m getting a taste of everything you’re going to put on the table — in sample portions and before you serve it.”

Belkovich’s philosophy is that delectable dishes do not necessarily require exotic ingredients. “Sometimes, however, I can immediately see that however much I was impressed by a dish, there is no chance of bringing to Russia, as it is either too exotic or requires ingredients that won’t be available locally,” he said. “For example, I once visited the kitchens of the famous New York restaurant Buddakan, where a chef showed me how they make turtle soup. They use one particular breed of turtles delivered fresh to the spot, and serve the dish with a shot of rice vodka mixed with turtle blood and a shot of vodka blended with turtle bile. The soup is a gastronomic delicacy, but its main ingredient is simply not available to me in Russia.”

As the chef points out, compared to Western Europe, the range of cooking ingredients in Russia is very limited, which does not encourage people to show much interest in culinary experiments. “How can your average Russian be adventurous if even bacon can only be found in about every tenth shop?” Belkovich said. His book aims to spark ordinary people’s interest in cooking by showing that even the most basic — and, most importantly, freely available — products can be used to create a mouthwatering dish.

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