

instant

SUZDAL

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Summer - Autumn 2011



Introducing Suzdal

Steeped in medieval history, but with little more than 10,000 residents, Suzdal is a little village living in a golden time warp. Star-sprinkled onion domes pepper the meandering rural landscape and black robed monks and nuns can be seen dashing around the town's squares on their way to services.

Dating back to 990 AD, Suzdal is one of the oldest towns in Russia and the 'jewel' of Russia's famous Golden Ring of ancient villages. In its heyday, Suzdal's Kremlin and monasteries held untold riches and its leaders fought with the princes of Moscow to make Suzdal the most important principality in Ancient Rus.

Following a devastating attack by a marauding Tatar army in the 14th Century, Suzdal's astonishing growth slowed and by the 16th Century, Suzdal had already become a political backwater, known mostly for the wealth of its monasteries and purity of its landscape.

Nowadays the town is filled with busy churches and monasteries and its streets are lined by colourful traditional wooden houses. Having survived the blight of Soviet town-planning, Suzdal looks much as it did centuries ago and is one of the most popular tourist sights in Russia. Fortunately the locals have taken the rise of their town into a tourist hot spot in their stride and life still rolls along at a gentle pace, free from Disney-esque folk shows and filled with rich local traditions.

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ESSENTIAL CITY GUIDES

Instant Suzdal

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Getting There

From Moscow's Kursky vokzal (station) local trains (*elektrichki*) leave twice a day at **08:00** and **14:19** to **Vladimir**, the price of a ticket is around 300Rbl and the tickets can be purchased from the machines at the right side of the station where local (*prigorodnie*) trains leave from. The journey to Vladimir takes about 3.5 hours and be aware that there are no toilets on the train.

At **Vladimir** you need to cross over to the bus station and buy a ticket (approx 50Rbl) for the bus to **Suzdal** (journey time is around 50 minutes), which leaves on the hour every hour until 21:00. The bus will take you to the bus station at the edge of Suzdal and for an extra 10Rbl will take you into the centre (the centre of Suzdal is approximately a 40 minute walk from the bus station).

Alternatively you can get to **Vladimir** by one of the **private buses** that leave from the right of **Kursky vokzal** close to the Chakolovskaya metro station (verkhny susalny pereulok). The price for the bus is about 250Rbl and the buses tend to leave every hour or so, depending on when the driver has decided that the bus is full enough to set off. Be sure to check that your bus is heading to Vladimir as there are many buses here that also head off to completely different Russian cities too. The bus usually makes one toilet stop on route and the journey can take between 3 and 4 hours depending on traffic.

Returning to Moscow, buses leave Suzdal for Vladimir every hour until around 20:00. **From Vladimir** there are two local trains which head to Moscow - one at **13:45** and one at **18:00**. Private buses leave for Moscow from outside Vladimir train station every hour until 21:00

Getting around Suzdal

As Suzdal is a very small town of only around 10,000 people, it is a place that is very easily navigated on foot.

In good weather bikes can be hired from the Godzillas hostel for 300Rbl a day. In bad weather (especially rainy weather) you should bear in mind that many of Suzdal's streets are not paved and can become very muddy, so bring appropriate footwear with you. Similarly in winter, the town is usually blanketed in pristine white snow, under which is almost always a precarious layer of ice, so sturdy boots are a must.

For getting to the bus station to catch a bus back to Vladimir, you can choose to walk for 40 minutes or pay one of the local taxi drivers 50Rbl to drive you there.

Religion

When entering an Orthodox church, always remember to dress conservatively - that means absolutely no shorts, short skirts, low cut tops, or sleeveless shirts. As you enter men should remove any headwear, whereas women should cover their heads. Usually at the entrance there will be a box of headscarves that you can borrow if you don't have your own. In Orthodox churches there are no chairs as when you meet with God you should be humble and standing. The very old and infirm may be allowed to sit for some time, but someone who is young or fit should never try to take a seat. If there is no service most believers will head for the icons, leaving a candle in front of it (representative of their prayer) and kissing the hands or face of the icon. During an Orthodox service, the priest (who should be addressed as *batushka*) will usually lead the congregation through a long session of prayer - which will sound like a long and mournful song. He will then circle the church spreading incense (representative of the sweetness of prayer), before returning back behind the iconostasis.

National holidays

January 1 New Year
January 7 Orthodox Christmas
February 23 Defender of the Fatherland Day
March 8 International Women's Day
May 1 Day of Spring and Labour
May 9 Victory Day
June 12 Russia Day
November 4 Day of Popular Unity

Note: all government offices and most other official institutions are closed on public holidays. Working days are often shifted. For instance, if it falls on a Tue or a Thu, then the weekend is shifted a day towards the holiday and the Sat or the Sun becomes an official working day.



Language

Although the official language is Russian, more than 100 minority languages are spoken such as Tatar, Ket and Vespian. Knowledge of English is sadly not as widespread as in European countries. If you can learn the Cyrillic alphabet it will make your life a lot easier.

Practicalities

No/Yes	Нет/Да	<i>nyet/da</i>
Hello	Здравствуй	<i>zdrastvuite</i>
Good Bye	До свидания	<i>dasvidanya</i>
Thank you	Спасибо	<i>spasibo</i>
Sorry	Извините	<i>izvinyite</i>
Please	Пожалуйста	<i>pazhalusta</i>
I don't understand	Я не понимаю	<i>ya nye panimayu</i>
How are you?	Как дела?	<i>Kak dela?</i>
Nice to meet you!	Рад встрече!	<i>Rad vstreche!</i>
Where is the...?	Где...?	<i>Gde...?</i>
I don't speak Russian	Я не говорю по русски	<i>Ya ne gavaryu pa russki</i>
Do you speak English?	Вы говорите по-английски	<i>Vy govoryite pa angliyski</i>
I love you!	Я тебя люблю!	<i>Y tyebya lyublyu!</i>
May I?	Можно?	<i>Mozhna?</i>

Alphabet

A	А	З	З	П	Р	Ч	CH
Б	В	И	И	Р	Р	Ш	SH
В	В	Й	И	С	С	Щ	SHCH
Г	Г	К	К	Т	Т	Ы	Y
Д	Д	Л	Л	У	У	Э	E
Е	YE	М	М	Ф	Ф	Ю	YU
Ё	YO	Н	Н	Х	KH	Я	YA
Ж	ZH	О	О	Ц	TS	Ъ,ь	no sound

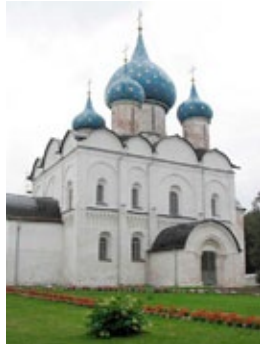
A full day in Suzdal would be enough to cover all of the town's main sights, although two days gives more time to do it at a leisurely pace. The biggest must sees are the Kremlin and the two largest monasteries; the Saviour monastery of St. Euthymius which contains several churches and museums in its ample grounds and the Pokrovsky Convent which is a well-restored fully working convent. A visit to the museum of wooden architecture is also worthwhile, whilst a walk around the Kamenka river will bring you past numerous other religious buildings in various states of decay and countless fairytale Russian wooden cottages or *izba* all set against the background of a beautifully pristine rural Russian landscape.



Kremlin

Like all Russian settlements, the heart of Suzdal is its Kremlin, which is much smaller than most of the monasteries and convents which were built in the town some centuries later. It is here that you can find Suzdal's oldest surviving building the 13th Century Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin and the museum of the history of Suzdal. The Kremlin also houses an impressive bell tower and wooden church, both of which buildings you sadly can only admire from the outside. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Tue and last Fri of the month. All inclusive ticket 300Rbl.

Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin Suzdal Kremlin, tel. (+7) 49231 21 624, www.museum.vladimir.ru. Dating back to 1225, this cathedral is the oldest in Suzdal and one of the oldest in Russia. Its distinctive blue star-spangled onion domes are 18th Century additions while the other immediately striking feature - the huge intricate gold inlaid doors - are a masterpiece of 13th Century craftsmanship. Inside the cathedral is covered in bright frescoes which are currently being restored to a very high lustre. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, last Fri of the month. Admission 30-70Rbl.



Suzdal History Museum Suzdal Kremlin, tel. (+7) 49231 21 624, www.museum.vladimir.ru. Consisting of

nine halls this museum traces the history of the town from the iron age via jewellery and arrow heads taken from local archaeological digs right through into the medieval era and beyond. There's a wealth of traditional medieval costumes and weaponry and remarkably well preserved religious texts dating from the 16th Century. Photographs and dioramas give insight into the contrasting lifestyles of the local nobility and peasants, while the final part of the exhibition deals with the Soviet destruction and later reconstruction of Suzdal's architectural treasures. The exhibition of old Russian painting focuses on local 15 - 17th Century iconography, while the exhibition 'Suzdal 100 years ago' does not really add anything worthwhile to the experience and is worth skipping. Be sure to buy a guide booklet at the entrance if you would like some English-language explanation of the exhibits. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Tue and last Fri of the month. Admission 100-200Rbl.



Museum of Wooden Architecture

Containing about twenty reconstructed wooden buildings, including a windmill, taken from the local area and dating back between 200 and 300 years, this 'living museum' tries to help you imagine more what life was like for the average Russian peasant. Although you can actually only go inside three of the houses as well as the old wooden church, there are plenty of skilled museum staff in traditional costume around adding an atmospheric touch. They offer demonstrations of how weaving looms worked or what the living quarters of an old country merchant were like. More hands on exhibits include the craftsmen making pottery and weaving bark into baskets and the group of musicians playing old Russian folk songs on ancient Russian stringed instruments. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00. Closed last Wed of the month. All inclusive ticket 200Rbl, 60Rbl during winter season.



Don't forget - Museum ticket offices (kassi) close one hour before official closing times. E.g., closing at 18:00 means buy your ticket by 17:00!

Pokrovsky Convent

Set on the banks of the river, the beautiful and tranquil 16th Century Pokrovsky Convent is not a museum and so the buildings contained inside its thick walls can only be viewed from the exterior. However the fact that you cannot visit the churches doesn't take anything away from the experience. Simply wandering around the carefully tended grounds and soaking up the blissful quiet whilst admiring the impressive Cathedral at the Convent's heart is enjoyable enough. The notorious former residents of this convent are many, as for centuries it was a favourite place for the Russian Tsars to dispose of their disgraced female kin. Famous women forced into the habit here include Ivan the Terrible's daughter-in-law and Peter the Great's first wife.

At the far end of the convent is a charming little cafe serving up simple Russian food. It also used to be possible to stay overnight in the numerous cottages here but in recent years the cottages have been given over to a local orphanage.



Saviour monastery of St. Euthymius

The largest of Suzdal's many monasteries, the St. Euthymius is a wonderfully preserved example of the might of the Russian Orthodox church in medieval times. Occupying a commanding position on a hill overlooking the river and the rest of the town, after spending a few hours exploring the many churches and museums inside the monastery, admire the view from outside the formidable walls and take a walk down to the Pokrovsky Convent in the distance for a magical 360 degree view of the town.

Entrance to the monastery can include any number of museums, although the easiest option is to pay 400Rbl for an all-inclusive ticket. There's also a small cafe selling blini and other Russian snacks close to the entrance.

Cathedral of the Transfiguration, tel. (+7) 49231 20 746, www.museum.vladimir.ru. At the heart of the

monastery sits this grand 16th Century monastery decorated inside with frescoes in the strikingly blue tempera that is distinctive to the Golden Ring area. Completing the ensemble of golden domes and impressive sanctity is the tall belfry sitting directly in front of the cathedral. Although it is not possible to go up it, it is still possible to hear the bells being rung, as they traditionally have been for centuries, on the hour every hour. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon and last Thu of the month. Admission 60-130Rbl.

Museums of St. Euthymius monastery, tel. (+7) 49231 20 746, www.museum.vladimir.ru. As well as

the popular prison museum, the monastery hosts a number of other small museums scattered in various ecclesiastical buildings in the monastery grounds. There's a **book museum, icon museum, gold treasury, museum of the history of monasteries** in the Suzdal area with numerous dioramas detailing the everyday life of Orthodox monks and nuns and a **restoration centre** where you can see the never-ending and painstaking work of Suzdal's restorers who sit in immaculate laboratories meticulously restoring the region's many treasures. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon and last Thu of the month. Admission 150-300Rbl (all inclusive ticket).

The Prison, tel. (+7) 49231 20 746, www.museum.vladimir.ru. Tucked away behind the Cathedral you will find the prison, which was in use when the site was a working monastery (enemies of the empire and disgraced clerics were held here) as well as in the 20th Century when the Soviets took over. In Stalinist times political prisoners were kept here, often before being sent out to their deaths in Siberia and their heartbreaking letters and photographs are on display. During World War II the prison changed hands many times and eventually became the place where captured Nazi generals were kept, pictures of which period are also on display. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon and last Thu of the month. Admission 20-40Rbl.



Vladimir

As you need to pass through Vladimir getting to and from Suzdal, if you have time it's worth taking a few hours to look at the sights of what is essentially the 'capital' of the Golden Ring along the way. Exit the station area and head straight up the hill. You will soon find yourself on Vladimir's main street Bolshaya Moskovskaya. Turn left and keep heading up the street to reach the hilltop Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God and a little further on, the Assumption and St. Demetrius Cathedrals designed by the same architect who built St. Basil's in Moscow and decorated with icons painted by Russian master Andrei Rublev. Enjoy the panoramic view of the city and then if you have time and appetite there's a good Caucasian restaurant called Shesh Besh serving up cheap Caucasian classics like cheese breads (khachapuri), shish kebabs (shashliki) and homemade wine at ul. Bolshaya Moskovskaya 78.



Tickets for photography and filming with video cameras can be purchased in all museums for 100Rbl. One ticket is valid for a whole day and can be used in any of Suzdal or Vladimir's museums.

