

THE COSSACKS

The name Cossack is likely from a Turkish word meaning, «a free, independent man who carries out a wild life beyond the reach of any government». Cossack culture is a horse culture born on the open steppes on the plains, grasslands and the rolling hills of the Don region. For centuries it has been the domain of many semi-nomadic people who were herdsmen with few permanent settlements.

Since the 16th century, however, the history of the Don country has been closely connected with the Cossacks. Large open and low areas of steppes were not inhabited for a long time except by these, «freemen», the Cossack. For this reason, a great number of peasants fled to the region of Dikoe Pole (*Wild Field*), the Don River, to escape the oppression of their landowners and feudal masters. The Cossacks established their own order in these lands, named «Krug» (*Circle*), a kind of a military-political organization which became the Don Host or Army.

The elected chief of the Cossack Army, the so-called Ataman, governed during the period between such Krugs and the executive power belonged to him.

The head of the newly elected Ataman would be «anointed» with mud, and a handful of soil poured down the collar of his tunic, thus reminding him he was not the leader, but only the servant of the whole community. And if he failed, he would be punished without mercy. This is quite a different form of coronation of any king.

Tsarist authorities of old Russia employed the Cossacks for military services and they became the best and most unpretentious troops of Russia. Cossacks expanded Russia's frontiers as far as the Pacific and to the borders of the kingdoms of the Middle and Far East.

War campaigns were the main activity of Cossacks and except for their military service Cossacks fished and hunted, keeping small gardens and domestic animals only as necessary for the family unit.

Their passion of freedom, love for family, courage in battle, and remarkable skill as horsemen has founded for the Cossack, a place in the history and great literature of Russia forever.

These stories, the people, the leaders and their way of life is all to be found, here, in the Rostov Region, along the Quiet Don, the homeland of the Cossack heritage, in the «Unexpected Russia».



STANITSA RAZDORSKAYA



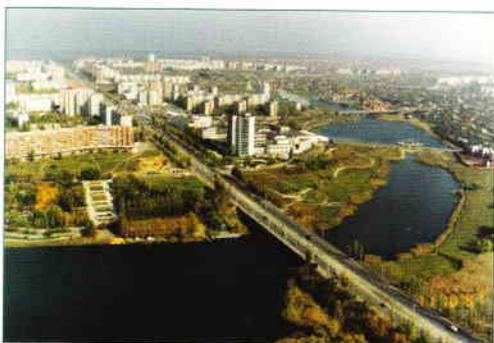
Stanitsa Razdorskaya is the oldest capital of the Don Cossacks. In this small village, the candle of freedom was lit with the first Cossack Host (*Army*) gatherings and formation of the unique «democratic» Republic of Free People along the Don River.

The Razdorskaya Memorial Museum keeps the items of historical and ethnographical material, the spiritual beginnings of the ancient Don people from the far distant past.

Very early records from the Byzantine 1100 A.D. mention these «Kazak», people who could not suffer being governed. Records from Islamic lands to the south, the Tatars, the Mongols of the khans from the East, the kingdoms of the Turks, Eastern Europe, and even the Russian Tsars, all recorded encounters and the opinions are unanimous with Byzantium's. The origins may always be hidden in the past, but the name «Kazak», free man, is more than just a word, more than an idea, it is life itself to some, most surely so to the Don Cossacks.

In the stanitsa, the most ancient type of unique Cossack architecture, the so called kuren houses remind us of the natural goodness a simpler way always seems. Here in Stanitsa Razdorskaya, if you ask, a hospitable Cossack mother might reveal a few of the secrets of the Cossack family, the dishes and life as it was once upon a time, in a land far, far away on the Don, in the «Unexpected Russia».

ROSTOV-ON-DON



Rostov-na-Donu (or *Rostov-on-Don*), the capital of the region, was founded in 1749 on the hills rising from the right bank of the river Don, a crossroads of sea and land trade routes.

Originally, a customs house was founded at the confluence of the Ternernik and the Don by decree of Empress Elizaveta (*Elizabeth*), daughter of Peter the Great. In 1761 protection for the customs house was strengthened by a military fortress named after Saint Dmitriy Rostovskiy. Settlements which grew around the fortress came to be officially named, «Rostov-na-Donu», by decree of Emperor Alexander I.

The location was perfect for the continuing economic growth and development of Rostov. In the early years the port received and embarked ships of Greek, Italian, Turkish, Armenian, Persian, and Russian merchants. To the world of trade throughout the Black Sea and Mediterranean, Rostov-on-Don came to be known as, «the Gateway to the Caucasus».

Today Rostov-on-Don is a modern, rapidly growing trade and transport gateway with its strategic seaport and international airport. The population of the city is nearing 1.5 million. In addition to being the region's governmental center, the city is known as a center for academic institutions, for science, agriculture, and the fine arts. Museums, opera, ballet and music theaters, shaded parks, romantic streets and three centuries of architecture surround the city center where many restaurants, cafes and shops serve the visitor, the tourist, and the people of Rostov.

If you would like to see the ancient treasures of the Don land, to understand the lively temperament and a glorious historical path of Don Cossacks, to walk on romantic Pushkin Street, and if you should wish to taste the delicious Cossack dishes and listen to fascinating Cossack songs — you are welcome to Rostov-on-Don, the city on the Quiet Don river in the «Unexpected Russia».

TAGANROG

Taganrog is an important historical, cultural and economic center in the Rostov region. This cozy town is a port on the northeast coast of the Taganrog Gulf of the Azov Sea. Taganrog today is more than 80 km² with a population more than 281 thousand people.

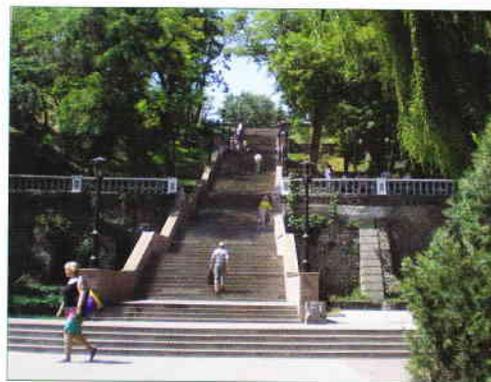
This picturesque town was founded as the main base of the Russian Navy by Peter the Great in 1696. In 1698 a decree was issued from Moscow for the construction of a fortress and port on the Tagan-Rog cape.

Through the end of 18th to the beginning of 19th century Taganrog developed as an international center of trade, attracting many nationalities, ethnic groups and people of various faiths.

Taganrog was one of few ports in the southern part of Russia where extended trade with foreign countries was possible. Taganrog kept its position of the largest port for foreign trade until the 1860s.

Taganrog is the birthplace of the great Russian writer Anton P. Chekhov. His literary and social activities have become inseparable from the city's historic legacy. Anton Chekhov's life story is as alluring as his writings and he is among the most loved playwrights in the English speaking world. There are several museums in the town dedicated to the life and creative work of this famous writer. The Alferaki Palace is the pearl of the city's architecture, housing at present the Museum for Folk Lore Studies.

Here you may visit the historical places connected with the life of this beloved and admired writer. Beautiful streets, quaint cottages as well as 18th and 19th century homes of prospering merchants of the time still stand. The many museums will bring to light a period of gracefulness and charm in Russian history. Come and discover with us more of the «Unexpected Russia» in Taganrog.



STAROCHERKASSK



The stanitsa (*village*) Starocherkasskaya, on an island in the Don, was the Cossack capital from the 1644s until 1805. Here is found a unique record of this exciting period of Russian history in the museum's artifacts, exhibits and architecture along the shaded streets. Starocherkassk is a place of significant spiritual value to Cossack heritage.

Historians attribute the foundation of Starocherkassk to 1570. It was protected by reinforced earthen walls, ramparts and a guard tower. Numerous ditches, like small canals, crossed the island, adding protection from seasonal high water from the river. These ditches, filled by vernal water, made the stanitsa look picturesque, and so came to be called «the Don Venice».

This small island village is so closely connected with many peasant wars, uprisings and attempts in to keep the freedom of the Cossacks in the steppes of the Don.

Starocherkassk's historical and architectural museum-reserve is included in the UNESCO international tourist's guidebook. Here is a living encyclopedia of the Don Cossack's as they lived in the 16–18th centuries.

The museum complex in the stanitsa was formed as a collection of historic and significant buildings, unique to the period and culture.

Of course among the most grand of these memorials is the Resurrection Cathedral. It was founded on the initiative of Peter the First. Deeply impressive are it's wonderful iconostasis, 125 icons of the 18th century are kept here, all made of wood and still a hallowed part of Orthodoxy. Next to the Cathedral is the bell-tower in the basement of which there was the prison.

The stanitsa is still famous for its religious value and contains a large orthodox monastery, which keeps a collection of the traditions of the monks and their spiritual deeds.

Now in Starocherkassk, the heritage still lives on in nearly 150 memorials, monuments, the legends and songs and in memories of many generations, kept now for us today and the future.

Starocherkassk is the heart of Cossack free lands for 400 years, «Unexpected Russia», the Region of Rostov.

NOVOCHERKASSK

Novocherkassk is the historical and modern capital of the Don Cossacks and one of the largest towns in the Rostov region (30 km from Rostov). About 200 thousand people of 88 nationalities live in Novocherkassk today, again the place of freemen, in the tradition of the Cossack heritage.

Novocherkassk was founded in 1805 by the Ataman (*Cossack army commander*) General Matvey Ivanovitch Platov. The new Cossack capital, the Novo (*New*) Cherkassk, was built using the most contemporary examples of European architecture of the period but at the same time taking into account Cossack cultural traditions.

The Novocherkassk Museum of the Don Cossacks contains a rich collection of unique historic material. A special place in the collection is occupied by the relics of the Don Cossacks including the decorative arms of generals and officers, battle banners and a collection of paintings.

The Vosnesenskiy (*Ascension*) Cathedral is the architectural treasure of the Don and the largest cathedral in the region. Referred to as «The Pearl of the Don» it was built in the Byzantine style in a central plaza where the Cossack army and cavalry regiments assembled for blessing and the prayers of families before going to war and battle.

Novocherkassk has been recognized as an historical, but also as a modern capital of the Don Cossacks and the Cossacks of whole of Russia. Cossack communities around the globe, recognize Novocherkassk as a world capital of Cossacks.

Novocherkassk, another gemstone in Don Country you can see in the «Unexpected Russia» and the region of Rostov.



AZOV

A site inhabited for over 2000 years, Azov is among the oldest towns of the region. Located where the river Don flows into the Sea of Azov, here began one of the trade routes that entered Asia, reaching the Great Silk Way to China.

Literary and historical records first mention Azov in 1067. Under the names Tana, Azak and Azov this ancient city of the Don area has established its place in history repeatedly. Azov is a classical example of what was known as the «watch-tower system of fortress» from the middle ages. The fortifications are still here. The ramparts and the powder magazine are unique examples of the military engineering skills of the 16th century. Walking the pedestrian route along the historical path of the town allows you to become a part of the past epochs of this original town.

Azov is famous for its great Cossack victories. In the heroic defense of Azov—a siege by Turkish forces pressed the fortress for 3 months. Cossacks withstood over 200 assaults by fearless Turkish troops. The Cossack army with 5000 warriors defended the town against 240 000 Turks.

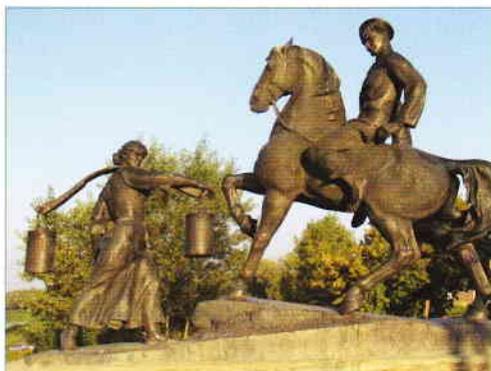
The capture and devastation of Azov by the armies of Tamerlan, the Azov siege and the Azov campaign of Peter I against the Turks are only some pages in the history of this wonderful city that was at the edge of Asia. Much of the old city has been preserved as it was. Azov holds in remembrance it's Venetian merchants, Tatar and Mongolian hordes who came here, the Turkish period, the Cossack defenders and many others well into the 20th century.

The Azov Archaeological and Paleontological Museum holds one of the largest and most valuable collections in the South of Russia, including a dinotherium skeleton, similar to today's elephant and two skeletons of trogonotherium, an early form of giant beaver.

Azov is here, full of its past, the city where East meets West and where the edge of empires rose and fell like waves upon the shores. Today new visitors who come will find the «Unexpected Russia» in Azov.



STANITSA VESHENSKAYA



Veshenskaya is one of the oldest Don stanitsas (*villages*) in the region. Located 350 km (200 miles) northwest of Rostov-on-Don, this old Cossack village has a special meaning for all of Russia but certainly the Don River country.

This Cossack village is famous as the homeland of the Nobel Prize winner, the great Russian writer Mikhail Sholokhov. In his epic novel «Tikhi Don» (*Quiet Flows the Don*), Sholokhov brought to life the subtle and intimate beauty of the nature of the Don entwined with the tradition and life of the Don Cossacks. Their individual lives and families were shaped and so influenced by the river and the land it touches and forever embraces. How can the two be separated? They cannot without great anguish. They are as one, as are the lives of those whose roots are here, also in the embrace, one with the other, the river, the land, and the lives. Mikhail Sholokhov's writing brought this to all of Russia and the world.

We will go with you on your journey, where Veshenskaya Stanitsa awaits you, a destination of literary history of epoch proportions in the «Unexpected Russia».

The State Museum keeps the collection of all the items connected with the life and the literary works of M. Sholokhov.

The folklore festival «The Sholokhov's Spring» is held in May in Veshenskaya. Folklore groups go through the stanitsa with songs, humorous sayings and rhymes and dances. The festival continues with theatrical performances of selected scenes from «Tikhi Don» in addition to concerts and fireworks.

Come and join us for a time of discovery, happiness and sharing in the adventures of the enduring region of the Don in the «Unexpected Russia».

AKSAY



The town of Aksay, just up river near Rostov-on-Don, on the high hills of the right bank of the Don, contains a remarkable record of military hardware history from the 1700's through the 20th century.

Aksay is also well-known for its museum complex «The Post Station of the 19th Century» located in the picturesque historical center of this former village. Famous personalities of Russian culture and history (Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Leo Tolstoy) have stayed here.

Aksay was on an important «Post Road» that went north to Moscow, south to the Caucasus and west to the sea ports. Many a tired traveler stopped and rested here on the way to meet their destiny.

In the 18th century Aksay was also an outpost with a system of fortified positions connected by underground passages. All the passages were equipped with weapons, food and supplies to sustain defense and control of the river and the opposite bank. In the suburbs of the town the underground customs house kept the secrets of old times.

Another place of interest in Aksay is the military open-air historical complex, located in the central part of the reserve called «Mukhin's hollow» (*Mukhina Balka*). This museum contains armaments and technical equipment of 19–20th centuries, including planes, military cars, guns, fighting machines of the infantry, tanks, military boats and command bunkers from the era of the Cold War.

Aksay, a town with a past, on a river in the south of «Unexpected Russia» will take you to the frontiers of empires in conflict and at peace.

TANAIS

Tanais is a name recorded by Herodotus, the early Greek historian. This was the name in the Greek world for the river Don and was given to the city at the mouth of the river where it flows into the Sea of Azov. It lies across the river delta from the city of Azov. The ruins of what once was a port of trade and commerce for 900 years is now an active archaeological research site and one of the largest open-air archaeological museums in Russia.

Tanais was a trading colony founded in the 3rd century B.C. by Greeks, who came from the Bosphorus Empire in Crimea.

In ancient times Tanais became important as an economic, cultural and political center of the region, establishing and maintaining connections between the Bosphorus settlements, kingdoms to the west and the nomadic tribes that inhabited the steppes north of the Black Sea and along the Don.

Tanais was also located where Europe and Asia were contiguous. For the west it was a place where Europe ended. Its situation on the edge of ancient Oecumene, a place where many cultures from the past had come together to form one, led to the creation of a special town culture and administrative structure, that reflected the mixed composition of the Tanais people.

The outlines of the walls are in place. The gates, the mote, ancient streets, the ruins of many of the city's structures and where the old shore was where docks would moor ships of trade from the ports of distant kingdoms are to be found here.

Shards of old pottery lie scattered across the ground, like broken dreams. Only a reminder of fortunes gained and lost, of lives and fates rising and falling at the will of emperors, warlords and khans, as unpredictable as the wind and tides of the sea that once was the life at Tanais.

The museum building outside the old walled city keeps a collection of exhibits and artifacts telling much of the people, daily life, art, crafts and skills of the community that endured and prospered here for 900 years. Statues and monuments, fragments of another world and time, stand in the yard and stare, holding the memories that lasted from a long ago age of heroes and myths into a time of a new historic epoch. Here above the marshlands of the river delta, on this windswept hill, are the memories to be read in these broken shards, beads, iron and bones kept by Tanais in the «Unexpected Russia» on the River Don.

