

Russians



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I. Description of Culture

A. Demographics

- The first Russian colony was founded in Alaska.
- Forty four percent of Russian Americans reside in the Northeast in places such as New York City.
- Settlements other than the Northeast include: Chicago, Cleveland, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and other coal mining towns of eastern Pennsylvania.
- Russians also settled on the west coast in San Francisco and Los Angeles, California.
- Specific to Maine, Russians have settled in the small town of Richmond.

B. Brief History

- Beginning in 1784, Kodiak, Alaska became the first Russian settlement in North America.
- In 1867, the Russians sold Alaska to the United States.
- During 1880 to 1914, the first period of immigration occurred, with the arrival of 3.2 million immigrants seeking to improve their economic status.
- Approximately fourteen thousand people fled Russia in 1920 to 1939 to escape the new Bolshevik/communist regime, the advance of Nazi Germany, and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.
- During 1945-1955, approximately 20,000 displaced Russians immigrated to the United States, as a result of World War II during which the Germans occupied the Soviet Union.
- Since the 1970's, conditions in Russia have improved resulting in a decline in immigration.
- In the 1950's Richmond, Maine had the largest Russian speaking population in the United States.

C. Food

- Food is of great importance in the lives of Russians
- Russians attempt to preserve eastern European cuisine and agriculture through growing peaches, pears, apples, and cherry trees.
- Russians enjoy a variety of soups, which frequently include potatoes or dumplings and are served with sour cream/*smetana*.
- Most famous soup is called *borshch* made from beets, cabbage and meat.
- Traditional dark Russian bread is made from rye. Wheat is becoming more popular.
- Vodka accompanies every meal.
- Russian tea ceremonies are held in the afternoon.

D. Language

- Russian is the largest of the Slavic languages.
- More than 250 million people speak Russian.
- The Russian language has its own alphabet called Cyrillic, which stems largely from the Greek alphabet.
- Russian requires that you look at the meaning, the class, and the use in order to understand a word.

E. Religion

- Russians are classified in three categories Orthodox Christians, Jews, and nominal Jews.
- Jews do not identify themselves as ethnic Russians.
- 9483 of Russians are Orthodox Christians.
- Russian Orthodoxy is a monotheistic religion.
- Prayer is structured with morning and evening prayers and at Saturday vespers, Sunday Liturgy and Holy days.
- Prayers are offered for both the living and the dead.
- Clergy are separated into married and celibate ranks and they preside over religious services.
- Services are open to Orthodox and non-Orthodox but only Orthodox may receive communion.
- Orthodox believe in at least seven mysteries and they are: baptism, chrismation, confession, anointing of the sick, marriage, holy ordination, and holy unction.
- Women are expected to wear a veil over their hair and formal attire is expected for both men and women.
- Services are conducted in Old Church Slavonic and the Julian calendar is followed.

F. Holidays

- The most important holiday is Holy Pascha (Easter).
- Holy Nativity (Christmas), the Russian Orthodox church celebrates Christmas on January 7th. This is the 25th of December in the Julian Calendar.
- Instead of celebrating birthdays, Russians celebrate name days.
- The Great Fast, before Easter, means that no meat or dairy products are eaten for 40 days.
- The Advent Fast, before Christmas, means that no meat or dairy is eaten from November 15th thru Christmas Eve.

II. Family and Gender Roles

- Family loyalty is one of the most important values.
- Russians preferred to live in large extended families, but this tradition has been difficult to maintain in the United States.
- The average children per household are 1.7 to 2.4.
- Russian children often resist maintaining the customs and heritage of the culture.
- Russian women are expected to pass on their cultural heritage to younger generations.
- In addition to holding a job women are expected to perform domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and care of sick elders.
- Men are expected to maintain a job to be able to financially support their families.
- Core values are described as: hard work, obeying the law, financial stability, and avoiding debt.

III. Concept of Work/Play/Time

- Classical music, opera, and ballet are some of the activities that Russians engage in during leisure time.
- Work is of extreme importance to Russians in order to maintain the value of keeping in excellent financial standing.
- Today men and women both work outside of the home
- In order to obtain respectable employment, first generation and generations to follow, value college degrees to move up the employment ladder.
- Russians concept of time is similar to most Americans in that it is polite to be on time. Russians, like most Americans, will not wait any longer than fifteen minutes if someone is running late.

IV. Health and Wellness

A. General Information

- The clinic is viewed as not only a place to receive health care, but also a place to socialize.
- Expect immediate attention by doctors when needed.
- Prefer allopathic treatment with supplementary methods such as homeopathy, physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture.
- Russians, especially older generations, are resistant to mental health services.
- Russians expect primary health physicians to address their mental health needs, rather than seeking a specialist in the mental health field.

- Russians have an increased perception of pain.

B. Challenges to Health Care

- Language is a barrier.
- Clinicians are at a disadvantage in treating the Russian population for lack of information about socio-cultural beliefs on individual health.
- Russians lack the understanding in preventative health care and may not perceive the need to engage in self-management as necessary.
- Misunderstanding about how the U.S health care system operates affects the continuity of care.

C. Suggestions for Health Care Providers

- Clinicians should make efforts to accommodate the language barrier by providing a translator when possible.
- Clinicians should be conscious of a Russian person's increased need for sympathy.
- Physicians should provide Russians with necessary knowledge of their condition.
- Health care providers should anticipate their patients may have a lower threshold for pain.

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