st basil's cathedral

History of St Basil's Cathedral. St Basil's Cathedral was **completed in 1561 to celebrate Russian victory over the Khanate of Kazan**. Its official name is the Cathedral of the Intercession, but it is most commonly known as St Basil's Cathedral, named after the holy fool Vasily who lived in the 16th century.

* The cathedral was recognised as significant and irreplaceable national monument by the Soviets. It underwent extensive restoration and became a museum of architecture, history, politics, and religion. Unlike many historical buildings, St Basil’s escaped demolition during Stalin’s regime.
* The background to the construction of St Basil’s Cathedral was the Kazan campaign of Tsar Ivan IV’s reign, the last in over a century of wars waged between the Khanate of Kazan and Russia. Before his pivotal campaign to capture the city of Kazan in 1552, Ivan the Terrible vowed to erect a cathedral to celebrate Russia’s victory.
* After Kazan fell to the Russians on 2nd October, the wooden Trinity Cathedral was constructed, fringed by seven chapels. When the Kazan Khanate finally acceded to the Russian state in 1555, Ivan ordered the reconstruction of the cathedral’s ensemble in stone. No one is certain who exactly designed St Basil’s Cathedral, though it is generally considered to be Russian architects Barma and Postnik.
* **Did you know?**Legend has it that Ivan the Terrible was so impressed by the cathedral that he had the architect blinded, so that its unique beauty and magnificence would never be recreated.
* The cathedral was to be rebuilt with eight independent churches encircling a larger central temple. Each church was consecrated in honour of important events in Russian spiritual or political life. St Basil’s Cathedral was completed in July 1561 and consecrated in honour of the Day of the Protection of the Holy Virgin.
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* **Did you know?**The central cupola of St Basil’s Cathedralis 65 metres tall. It remained the tallest building in Moscow for 39 years following its completion!
* The official name given was the**Cathedral of the Intercession on the Moat** (Pokrovsky Sobor), but it is more commonly known as St Basil’s Cathedral (Sobor Vasiliya Blazhennogo). Saint Vasily (Basil) was a holy fool and soothsayer, whose miraculous abilities even gained the respect of Ivan the Terrible. Ivan’s son ordered a chapel to be erected in Vasily’s honour, which was completed in 1588 on the site of his grave. The chapel was open day and night and was the only heated church in the cathedral ensemble; soon, it became synonymous with the cathedral as a whole.

St Basil’s Cathedral fell under grave threat during the Patriotic War of 1812. When Napoleon’s army invaded Moscow, they plundered the cathedral and set up stables inside. On retreating from Moscow, Napoleon ordered his chief of artillery to destroy the cathedral; however, the pouring rain extinguished the lit fuses of the explosives.

* The Soviets recognised St Basil’s Cathedral as significant and irreplaceable national monument. It wasdecided to maintain and restore the cathedral, and transform it into a museum with exhibitions about architecture, history, politics, and religion. St Basil’s opened to the public in May 1923, and in 1928, became a branch of the State History Museum, where it has remained ever since.
* **Did you know?** It was rumoured that Ivan the Terrible’s library, a collection of books and documents passed down from the Byzantine emperors, could lie somewhere below the cathedral. Exploration of the cathedral continued well into the 20th century, with archaeologists hunting for treasure, secret passages, and more!
* Red Square was used for enormous parades and demonstrations, and under Stalin, various historical buildings were flattened to maximise space there. One of Stalin’s closest associates, Lazar Kaganovich, suggested demolishing St Basil’s Cathedral-Kaganovich had already overseen the destruction of Christ the Saviour Cathedral and the Kremlin’s Kazan Cathedral. However, architect Pyotr Baranovsky begged the Politburo to leave the cathedral untouched, and even sent a telegram to Stalin himself. Baranovsky is credited with saving St Basil’s.
* St Basil’s Cathedral was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1990. Church services resumed in 1991 and work began to finally bring the cathedral’s bells back to life – today, the bell tower is home to 19 bells ranging from 25 to nearly 500 years old! In 2007, the St Basil’s was declared to be one of the Seven Wonders of Russia.
* Today, St Basil’s Cathedral bustles with spiritual and secular activity. Aside from its chapels and church services, the cathedral is also home to festivals, exhibitions, artistic events, concerts, and so much more.

What can you see at St. Basil’s Cathedral today?

* **Exterior:** St Basil’s architecture is unique throughout the whole of Russia. Its nine church towers are crowned with candy-coloured onion domes, and embellished with layers of cornices, kokoshniks, windows, colourful tiles and patterns.
* **Interior:** St Basil’s ensemble comprises eleven churches, each with unique architecture and artistic decoration and consecrated in honour of significant events in Russia’s political and spiritual history. Visitors can discover marvellous artwork, magnificent iconostases housing hundreds of masterful icons, and valuable exhibits belonging to the church and imperial family.
* St Basil’s Cathedral boasts a design unparalleled anywhere else in Russia, indicating the brilliant talent of its creators who dared to break the traditional canons of religious architecture. Its nine towers are crowned with candy-coloured onion domes exuding festivity and cheerfulness. Each tower is embellished with layers ofcornices, kokoshniks, and windows; floral motifs snake up the porches, stairs and galleries; and geometric tiles and patterns punctuate the brickwork.
* Originally, St Basil’s Cathedral was not the riot of colour that we see today, but had an austere red and white façade. In the 17th and 18th centuries, successive emperors and empresses significantly modified the cathedral’s appearance. Brick porches and galleries were added, multicoloured paintwork and tiles brightened the façade, and the ornamental domes attained their vibrant colours and design.

**5 Fascinating Facts About Saint Basil's Cathedral, the Cultural Gem of Moscow**

* It was commissioned by Ivan the Terrible.
* The building is made up of 10 churches.
* The exterior was originally painted white.
* Saint Basil's Cathedral isn't the official name.
* The cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage Site
* Ivan Vasilyevich (1530-1584), the **first Tsar of Russia**, ordered the construction of the cathedral in 1555 following Russia's capture of the independent Khanate of Kazan. Ivan's reputation as a cruel and stern leader led to his more popular nickname, **Ivan the Terrible**. In fact, some stories of the cathedral's construction say that Ivan blinded the unnamed architect (or architects) so that there would never be another building like it.
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* The layout of the cathedral is based around one massive central church called the Intercession. Four large churches are arranged around the central core like **compass points**, and four smaller churches are diagonally placed. Despite the systematic grouping of these chapels, the cathedral as a whole is **asymmetrical** and changes appearance depending on the vantage point.
* A **tenth church**was added in 1588 in honor of its namesake, Saint Basil, also known as Basil, fool for Christ.
* Although today Saint Basil's Cathedral is recognized for its vibrant palette, the colorful exterior was not added until 200 years after the structure was completed. In fact, it is believed that the cathedral was **originally painted white** with golden domes.
* It was only in the **17th century** that Russian architectural styles began including more whimsical color schemes. Saint Basil's, in particular, received the inspiration for its decoration from a passage in the *Book of Revelation*, which describes the Heavenly City.
* Like other cultural landmarks, St. Basil's Cathedral has survived several different epochs of world history. In 1928, the building was confiscated by the Soviet Union and turned into a secular museum. Many decades later, in 1990, the cathedral was recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** alongside the Kremlin and Red Square.
* The building has since returned to its original purpose and began operating as a church. Since 1997, it has served as an Orthodox cathedral with weekly services.

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| **Cathedral of the Intercession of Most Holy Theotokos on the Moat** |
| Собор Покрова Пресвятой Богородицы, что на Рву ([Russian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_language)) |
| Saint Basil's Cathedral, Moscow, RussiaSaint Basil's Cathedral as viewed from [Red Square](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Square) |
| **Religion** |
| [**Affiliation**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religions_and_spiritual_traditions) | [Russian Orthodox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox) |
| [**Ecclesiastical or organizational status**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastical_polity) | [State Historical Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Historical_Museum) with occasional church services since 1991 |
| **Year consecrated** | 12 July 1561[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral#cite_note-1) |
| **Status** | Active |
| **Location** |
| **Location** | [Red Square](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Square), [Moscow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow), [Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) |
| [**Geographic coordinates**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system) | [55°45′9″N 37°37′23″E](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral&params=55_45_9_N_37_37_23_E_type:landmark_scale:1000_region:RU)[Coordinates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [55°45′9″N 37°37′23″E](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral&params=55_45_9_N_37_37_23_E_type:landmark_scale:1000_region:RU) |
| **Architecture** |
| [**Architect(s)**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architect) | [Ivan Barma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Barma) and [Postnik Yakovlev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postnik_Yakovlev%22%20%5Co%20%22Postnik%20Yakovlev)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral#cite_note-MC-2) |
| **Type** | [Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_%28building%29) |
| **Groundbreaking** | 1555 |
| **Specifications** |
| **Height (max)** | 47.5 metres (156 ft)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral#cite_note-3) |
| [**Dome**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome)**(s)** | 10 |
| **Dome height (inner)** | ff |
| [**Spire**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spire)**(s)** | 2 |
| [UNESCO World Heritage Site](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) |
| *Official name: Kremlin and Red Square, Moscow* |
| **Type** | Cultural |
| **Criteria** | i, ii, iv, vi |
| **Designated** | 1990[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral#cite_note-4) |
| **Reference no.** | [545](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/545) |
| **State Party** | [Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) |
| **Region** | [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_Europe) |
| **Session** | 14th |