Nizhny Novgorod, Russia's third largest city lies in the Povolzhye region - literally meaning "Along the Volga River". The Volga River has always been the lifeline of the Russian nation, especially as it was an important trade route between the east and the west, as the river wound its way through central Russia. The city of Nizhny Novgorod is one of the prettiest places along the Volga.

It has also evolved into a growing financial centre where business transactions are actively encouraged by the government and western firms are welcome. Nizhny Novgorod goes a long way back - to the 13th century when it was founded by Grand Prince Yuri as an important town on the confluence of the Volga and the Oka Rivers. Prince Yuri realised its potential as the frontline town for commerce and trade and the first line of defence against foreign invasions. Consequently, his very first task was to build a Kremlin (fortress) and a protective moat surrounding the town.

The Kremlin in Nizhny Novgorod like others of its ilk is positioned at a vantage point on a hill, within its precincts were constructed the Prince's palace, cathedrals and monasteries. Most of the buildings in the Kremlin today are offices of the local government/administration. Little remains of the early constructions except for the impressive Cathedral of the Archangel Michael. In little more than two hundred years between its founding and the 14th century, Nizhny was destroyed by the Tatar Horde seven times, only to be rebuilt by its resilient residents.

The city became part of the unified Russian empire in 1393 and lost much of its eminence but by the 17th century regained its former status as an important centre for trade, commerce and shipping. With the arrival of the railways in the middle of the 19th century, Nizhny Novgorod became the industrial centre of Russia, the hub of ship building and manufacturing. The first locomotives in Russia and the very first motorised ships to be built anywhere in the world were built in Nizhny Novgorod. During the years of the Soviet regime, Nizhny continued to be an important production centre but lost any claims to cultural or historical relevance. The closest it came to any kind of glory was when the dissident physicist and Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov was sent into exile to Nizhny; he lived here till his rehabilitation in the late 1980s.

Contemporary Nizhny figures high on the list of business travellers but is of little interest to tourists - those who travel here find it pleasant and charming in a limited kind of fashion. The places to visit in Nizhny Novgorod include the Fine Arts Museum with its displays of 14th century religious icons, the Applied Arts Museum that preserves local crafts, the Sakharov Museum and the Gorky Museum. Nizhny Novgorod also has its share of churches and monasteries - the 17th century Assumption Church built in stone, the baroque Nativity Church, the Saviour Old Market Cathedral with its astounding dome, the Annunciation Monastery and the 18th century Pechorsky Monastery.

International flights connect Nizhny Novgorod to Frankfurt au Main three times a week, daily flights connect it to Moscow. Trains from Moscow (7hrs), Yekaterinburg (22hrs ) and Perm (15hrs) also connect the city as do buses from Moscow and Ulyanovsk. Once in the city there are trams, trolleys, the metro, buses, taxis and car rentals to get around. Hotels in the city are not very expensive. The most upmarket ones have modern rooms with the standard facilities; less expensive options are the hotels in the older buildings. Nizhny Novgorod has plenty of good places to dine in - diners will easily find everything from ethnic Russian to American fast food.

Alphabank on ulitsa Semashko gives cash advances against international credit cards besides exchanging money. It also has an ATM. The post office at ulitsa Bolshaya Pokrovskaya offers Internet accessibility too. Intourist and other travel companies that have offices in Nizhny will arrange tours, book air tickets and excursions around the region.