# Your Complete Pre-Departure Checklist: From Accepted to Arrived

Congratulations on your acceptance into a Russian university. This is a monumental achievement that marks the beginning of an exciting academic and cultural journey. The path from receiving your acceptance letter to arriving on campus involves a series of crucial steps that require careful planning and meticulous execution. This guide, prepared by our team of international education experts, is designed to serve as your comprehensive roadmap. It demystifies the entire pre-departure process, ensuring a smooth and stress-free transition from an accepted applicant in India to a successfully settled student in Russia.

The checklist is organized chronologically into four distinct parts, each covering a critical phase of your preparation:

* **Part 1: The Foundation Phase (The First 30 Days After Acceptance):** Immediate actions that lay the groundwork for your entire journey.
* **Part 2: The Core Preparation Phase (2-3 Months Before Departure):** The intensive period of visa applications and financial arrangements.
* **Part 3: The Final Countdown (The Last 4 Weeks):** Finalizing logistics, travel, and strategic packing.
* **Part 4: Arrival and Your First Week in Russia (The Settlement Phase):** Navigating your first crucial days on the ground.

By following this guide, you will be well-equipped to manage every administrative, financial, and logistical task with confidence, allowing you to focus on the incredible educational experience that awaits you.

## Part 1: The Foundation Phase (The First 30 Days After Acceptance)

The actions taken in the month immediately following your acceptance are the most critical. They establish the foundation and timeline for every subsequent step. Diligence and proactivity during this phase are paramount to avoiding delays and complications later in the process.

### Section 1.1: Secure and Scrutinize Your University Invitation Letter

The single most important document you will receive after your acceptance is not from the university itself, but from the Russian government. This official "Invitation Letter" is the mandatory prerequisite for your student visa application and dictates the entire timeline of your departure preparations.1

Unlike the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) for the UK or the Form I-20 for the US, which are issued directly by educational institutions, the Russian invitation is a state-sanctioned document. It is issued by the regional office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Russian Federation upon your university's formal request.1 The processing time for this document can be significant, often taking up to 45 calendar days.6 This waiting period creates a critical dependency; no visa application can be initiated until this letter is in your possession. Therefore, it is essential to treat its acquisition as your first and most urgent priority.

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Initiate the Process Immediately:** As soon as you formally accept your university's offer of admission, contact the international student office or your designated university coordinator. Explicitly request that they begin the process of obtaining your official Invitation Letter from the MIA or MFA.
* **Confirm Timeline and Format:** Inquire about the expected processing time and the format in which you will receive the letter. Invitations can be issued as an original hard copy or in an electronic format.1 The Russian Consulate in India will have specific requirements for which format is acceptable, so it is vital to clarify this with your university.
* **Meticulously Verify All Details:** Once you receive the Invitation Letter, you must conduct a thorough review. Cross-reference every single detail with your passport. Pay extremely close attention to the following:
  + **Full Name:** Ensure the spelling and order of your given name and surname match your passport exactly.
  + **Date of Birth:** Verify the day, month, and year.
  + **Passport Number:** Check every digit and character.
  + **Passport Validity Dates:** Ensure the issue and expiry dates are correct.
* Any discrepancy, no matter how minor, between your Invitation Letter and your passport is a common reason for visa rejection and will necessitate a new invitation, causing severe delays.1

### Section 1.2: Prepare Your Document Dossier

Navigating Russian bureaucracy, much like its French counterpart, requires a highly organized approach to paperwork. The concept of a *dossier*—a comprehensive and meticulously organized file of all personal, academic, and financial documents—is not just a recommendation but a crucial strategy for success.7 You will need these documents not only for the initial visa application but also for university registration, migration registration upon arrival, opening a bank account, and subsequent visa extensions. Establishing this master file from day one will save you invaluable time and prevent significant stress.

A critical preliminary check is your passport's validity. The Russian Federation requires a student's passport to be valid for a minimum of **18 months from the start date of the visa**, and it must contain at least two completely blank pages.1 This is a much stricter requirement than that of many other countries, which typically ask for only six months of validity.11

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Conduct a Passport Audit:** Immediately check your passport's expiration date. If it does not meet the 18-month validity requirement, you must begin the renewal process with the Indian passport authorities without delay.
* **Gather Original Documents:** Systematically collect all essential original documents. This includes your birth certificate, all academic mark sheets and certificates from the 10th standard onwards, and any language proficiency test scores (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL).3
* **Digitize and Duplicate:** Create high-resolution digital scans of every single document. Store these in multiple secure locations: a primary cloud service (like Google Drive or Dropbox), a secondary cloud service as a backup, and on a physical USB flash drive. Additionally, make at least two high-quality photocopy sets of all documents and organize them in a waterproof folder.12 This redundancy ensures you are prepared for any eventuality, including loss or damage to the originals.

**Table 1: Document Dossier Checklist**

| Document | Purpose | Status |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Passport** | Primary ID, Visa Application, Travel | ☐ |
| **University Invitation Letter** | Prerequisite for Visa Application | ☐ |
| **University Admission Letter** | Proof of Enrollment for Visa & Arrival | ☐ |
| **Birth Certificate** | Identity Verification | ☐ |
| **10th Standard Mark Sheet & Certificate** | Academic History for Visa & University | ☐ |
| **12th Standard Mark Sheet & Certificate** | Academic History for Visa & University | ☐ |
| **Bachelor's Degree Mark Sheets (All Semesters)** | Academic History for Visa & University | ☐ |
| **Bachelor's Degree Certificate / Provisional** | Proof of Qualification | ☐ |
| **Language Proficiency Scorecard (IELTS/TOEFL)** | Proof of Language Ability (if required) | ☐ |
| **Passport-Sized Photographs** | Visa Application & Other Registrations | ☐ |
| **HIV Test Certificate** | Mandatory for Student Visa Application | ☐ |
| **Financial Documents (Bank Statements, Loan Letter)** | Proof of Funds for Visa Application | ☐ |
| **Tuition Fee Payment Receipt** | Proof of Payment for Visa & University | ☐ |
| **Health Insurance Policy** | Mandatory for Stay in Russia | ☐ |
| **Flight Itinerary (Post-Visa)** | Travel Planning & Arrival Information | ☐ |
| **Accommodation Proof (if available)** | For Visa Application & Arrival | ☐ |

## Part 2: The Core Preparation Phase (2-3 Months Before Departure)

This phase begins once you have your official Invitation Letter. It is the most administratively intensive period, focusing on securing your student visa, finalizing financial arrangements, and arranging mandatory health coverage.

### Section 2.1: The Russian Student Visa Application: A Step-by-Step Guide

The visa you apply for in India is an initial **single-entry student visa valid for 90 days**.2 Upon arrival in Russia, you must extend this and convert it into a one-year, multiple-entry visa through the local migration authorities. The application process in India is managed through official Russian Visa Centres, typically operated by VFS Global.1

**Actionable Steps:**

1. **Complete the Online Application Form:** The first step is to fill out the electronic visa application form on the official website of the Consular Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: visa.kdmid.ru.1
   * When prompted to select the country of application, choose "INDIA".
   * Select the specific visa centre where you will submit your documents (e.g., New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata).
   * Fill out every section with meticulous care. The information must perfectly match the details in your passport and your official Invitation Letter. Any inconsistencies can lead to rejection.1
   * Once completed, print the application form, which will include a summary page with a barcode. Sign it in the designated space.
2. **Schedule Your VFS Global Appointment:** After printing the application form, visit the VFS Global Russia website for India to book an appointment for document submission and biometrics.
3. **Assemble Your Visa Dossier for Submission:** Organize the following documents precisely as required:
   * **Passport:** The original passport, which must meet the 18-month validity rule and have at least two blank pages.1
   * **Visa Application Form:** The printed and signed copy from the visa.kdmid.ru portal.1
   * **Photograph:** One recent passport-style photograph (3.5cm x 4.5cm) with a light background. This photo must be physically glued to the marked space on the application form.1
   * **Official Invitation Letter:** The original invitation from the Russian MIA/MFA, or a high-quality copy if an electronic version was issued and is permitted by the consulate.1
   * **Academic Documents:** Photocopies of your 10th, 12th, and degree certificates and mark sheets.3
   * **HIV Test Certificate:** An original, signed certificate confirming a negative HIV test result. This is a non-negotiable requirement for student visas.2
   * **Proof of Financial Support:** Documents demonstrating your ability to cover tuition and living costs, as detailed in the next section.
   * **Parental Consent (if applicable):** If you are under 18, a notarized letter of consent from both parents is required.13

The mandatory HIV test presents a unique logistical challenge due to its strict validity window. The test must be taken no more than three months before your visa application date, and the certificate itself must still be valid for at least 15-30 days at the moment you submit your documents at the VFS centre.2 This requires precise coordination. You must first identify a clinic that provides the required certificate format, confirm the lab's result turnaround time, and then schedule your VFS appointment to fall squarely within this narrow window of validity. Mismanaging this timeline is a common and entirely avoidable reason for application delays.

### Section 2.2: Financial Planning & Proof of Funds

While Russia does not have a formalised program like Canada's Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC), the visa authorities require robust and transparent proof that you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition fees and living expenses for at least the first year of your studies.13

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Calculate Your Budget:** Create a detailed budget for your first year. Your university will provide the exact tuition fee. For living expenses, a reasonable estimate is between ₹17,000 and ₹34,000 ($200-$400) per month, though this can vary by city.22 It is prudent to budget on the higher end of this range.
* **Organize Financial Documents:**
  + **Sponsorship:** If your parents or another family member are sponsoring you, you must provide a comprehensive set of documents: stamped bank statements for the last six months, salary slips for the last three to six months, and Income Tax Returns (ITR) for the past two years. Crucially, you must also include a notarized Affidavit of Support, which is a formal letter from your sponsor confirming their relationship to you and their commitment to cover your educational and living costs.13
  + **Education Loan:** If you are funding your studies through an education loan, the official loan sanction letter from a recognized Indian financial institution is the primary document required. This letter must clearly state your name, the loan amount, and the purpose of the loan.13
* **Pay Your Tuition Fees:** Russian universities often require a portion or the full first-year tuition fee to be paid in advance. The most reliable method for this is an international wire transfer through an authorized dealer bank in India or a specialized remittance service.24 The transaction confirmation, often called a SWIFT receipt, is a critical document for your visa application and should be preserved carefully.
* **Manage Your Personal Funds for Travel:**
  + **Forex Card:** Obtain a multi-currency forex card from a provider like HDFC Bank or ICICI Bank. Load it with a sufficient amount (e.g., $1,000-$2,000) to cover your initial expenses upon arrival.26
  + **Cash:** Carry a small amount of cash, approximately $300 to $500, in either US Dollars or Euros. These are easily exchangeable for Russian Rubles (RUB) at the airport or city exchange bureaus upon arrival.
  + **Inform Your Indian Bank:** Before you travel, you must notify your Indian bank of your travel dates and destination. This prevents your Indian debit and credit cards from being flagged for suspicious activity and blocked when you might need them as a backup.28

**Table 2: Estimated First-Year Budget Planner**

| Expense Category | Estimated Cost (INR) | Your Actual Cost (INR) | Notes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **One-Time Costs** |  |  |  |
| Visa Application Fee | ₹5,000 - ₹8,000 |  | Depends on entry type and processing speed 23 |
| HIV Test & Medicals | ₹3,000 - ₹5,000 |  | Varies by clinic |
| Airfare (One-Way) | ₹30,000 - ₹50,000 |  | Book post-visa approval |
| VHI/DMS Health Insurance | ₹5,500 - ₹9,500 |  | Mandatory for entire year 13 |
| **Annual Recurring Costs** |  |  |  |
| Tuition Fees | ₹92,500 - ₹350,000 |  | Check university invoice 13 |
| Accommodation (Dormitory) | ₹55,500 - ₹140,000 |  | 13 |
| **Monthly Living Expenses** |  |  |  |
| Groceries & Food | ₹7,000 - ₹10,000 |  | Budget for ₹84,000 - ₹120,000 annually |
| Public Transportation | ₹1,500 - ₹3,000 |  | Student passes offer discounts 13 |
| Internet & Mobile Plan | ₹800 - ₹1,200 |  | 13 |
| Personal & Miscellaneous | ₹5,000 - ₹8,000 |  | Leisure, books, supplies |
| **Total Estimated First-Year Cost** | **~ ₹200,000 - ₹550,000+** |  | **Excluding tuition** |

### Section 2.3: Arranging Mandatory Health Insurance

It is a legal requirement for all international students to have a valid health insurance policy, known as Voluntary Health Insurance (VMI) or *Dobrovolnoe Meditsinskoe Strakhovanie* (DMS), for the entire duration of their stay in Russia.32 This is distinct from the short-term travel insurance you might purchase for your journey. The VMI/DMS policy is what grants you access to the Russian healthcare system and is a prerequisite for maintaining your legal student status. Failure to acquire and maintain this insurance can result in disciplinary action from your university.32

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Check University Recommendations:** Your first step should be to inquire with your university's international student office. Many universities have partnerships with specific insurance providers and may offer group plans designed for students, which simplifies the process significantly.32
* **Verify Policy Compliance:** If you are purchasing a policy independently, you must ensure it meets the requirements of the Russian government. The policy must be valid for the entire territory of the Russian Federation and cover a comprehensive range of services, including outpatient and inpatient care, emergency medical services, and medical repatriation.32
* **Secure the Certificate:** Once purchased, you will receive an insurance certificate. Keep both digital and physical copies of this certificate. You will need to present it during your final on-campus registration and when you apply to extend your visa after your first 90 days.

## Part 3: The Final Countdown (The Last 4 Weeks)

With your visa approved and finances in order, the final month is dedicated to logistics. This includes booking your travel, packing strategically for a new climate, and meticulously organizing your hand luggage to ensure a smooth airport experience.

### Section 3.1: Booking Flights & Travel Arrangements

The golden rule of booking your flight is to wait until the student visa is officially stamped in your passport. Booking beforehand is a significant financial risk. Many international airlines offer special student fares that include a more generous baggage allowance, which is a considerable advantage when moving abroad for a long period.35

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Search for Student Fares:** Explore the official websites of airlines that fly from India to Russia, such as Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, and IndiGo. Look for a "student fare" or "student offer" booking option. These fares often permit two checked bags of 23 kg each, a significant increase over the standard allowance.35 You will typically need to provide proof of your student status (e.g., admission letter or student visa) during booking or at check-in.
* **Plan Your Arrival Date:** Aim to arrive in Russia on a weekday (Monday to Friday). This ensures that your university's international office, administrative services, and local banks will be open, allowing you to begin the crucial post-arrival registration processes without delay.39
* **Share Your Itinerary:** Once your flight is confirmed, share a copy of your complete itinerary with your family, your university's international student office, and any contacts you have in Russia.

### Section 3.2: Strategic Packing for Russia's Climate

Packing for Russia requires a strategic approach focused on layering and preparing for extremely cold winters. Temperatures in major student cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg can frequently drop to between −9∘C and −20∘C from November to March.40

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Clothing:**
  + **Base and Mid-Layers:** These are the most important items. Pack several sets of thermal innerwear (tops and bottoms), long-sleeved cotton t-shirts, and fleece jackets or woollen sweaters. These can be layered to adapt to changing temperatures indoors and outdoors.44
  + **Outerwear:** Bring one high-quality, waterproof, and windproof heavy jacket from India. However, it is highly advisable to purchase your primary winter coat in Russia. Locally available coats are specifically designed to handle the severity of a Russian winter and often offer better insulation.44
  + **Accessories:** These are non-negotiable for winter. Pack several pairs of thick woollen socks, waterproof and insulated gloves or mittens, a warm scarf that can cover your face, and a beanie or *ushanka* (a traditional Russian fur cap) that fully covers your ears.44
  + **General Wear:** Include several pairs of jeans or sturdy trousers, a few casual outfits, one set of formal attire for official events, and one traditional Indian outfit (like a kurta set or saree) for cultural festivals and university events.48
* **Footwear:**
  + Bring one pair of comfortable, sturdy walking shoes for daily use in autumn and spring.
  + A pair of insulated, waterproof winter boots with good grip is absolutely essential. This is another item that may be best purchased in Russia to ensure it is suitable for local conditions.14
* **Electronics:**
  + Pack your laptop, smartphone, a high-capacity power bank, and all corresponding chargers.
  + **Critical Item:** Russia uses Type C and Type F electrical sockets, which operate at 230V. This is different from the Type D/M sockets used in India. You must pack at least two high-quality universal travel adapters. It is also wise to bring a multi-socket power strip from India, allowing you to charge multiple devices using just one adapter.14
* **Personal and Indian Essentials:**
  + **Medications:** Carry a one- to two-month supply of any prescription medications. They must be in their original packaging and accompanied by a doctor's prescription that clearly states the generic name of the drug and the medical condition it is for.48
  + **First-Aid Kit:** Assemble a personal first-aid kit containing essentials like adhesive bandages, antiseptic wipes, pain relievers (e.g., Paracetamol), medication for colds, coughs, and indigestion.
  + **Spices and Comfort Foods:** To ease your transition, pack a small starter kit of essential Indian spices (like turmeric, cumin, coriander, and garam masala) in sealed, airtight containers. A few ready-to-eat meal packets (e.g., poha, upma) can be a lifesaver during your first few days before you have a chance to go grocery shopping.48 Do not overpack food items; major Russian cities have stores where you can find Indian ingredients.
* **Items to Purchase in Russia:** To save precious luggage space and weight, plan to purchase bulky items after you arrive. This includes duvets, pillows, heavy blankets, most kitchen utensils (pots, pans, cutlery), and large toiletries.14

### Section 3.3: Assembling Your Hand Luggage

Your carry-on bag is your lifeline for the journey and the first 48 hours in Russia. It must contain all your critical documents, essential medications, and immediate necessities. Under no circumstances should original documents be placed in your checked baggage.12

**Table 3: Hand Luggage 'Arrival Dossier' Checklist**

| Document/Item | Purpose | Check |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Waterproof Document Folder** | **To hold all original documents** | ☐ |
| Passport with Russian Student Visa | Entry into Russia & Identity | ☐ |
| Original University Invitation Letter | Immigration Verification | ☐ |
| University Admission/Offer Letter | Immigration & University Registration | ☐ |
| All Original Academic Transcripts/Certificates | University Registration | ☐ |
| Tuition Fee Payment Receipts (SWIFT Copy) | Proof of Financial Compliance | ☐ |
| Accommodation Proof (Booking Confirmation) | Immigration & Address Reference | ☐ |
| Health & Travel Insurance Policies | Proof of Coverage | ☐ |
| HIV Test Certificate (Original) | Potential Re-verification | ☐ |
| Emergency Contact List | University, Embassy, Family Contacts | ☐ |
| **Other Carry-On Essentials** |  |  |
| One Change of Clothes & Basic Toiletries (<100ml) | For Transit & Arrival Comfort | ☐ |
| All Prescription Medications & Prescriptions | Health & Customs Declaration | ☐ |
| Phone, Laptop, Power Bank, Chargers | Connectivity & Communication | ☐ |
| Universal Travel Adapter | To Charge Electronics on Arrival | ☐ |
| Forex Card & USD/EUR Cash | Immediate Financial Needs | ☐ |
| Pen (for filling forms) | Completing Migration Card | ☐ |

## Part 4: Arrival and Your First Week in Russia (The Settlement Phase)

Your journey culminates in your arrival in Russia. The first week is a critical period for completing mandatory legal formalities that formalize your status as a student resident. Prioritizing these administrative tasks is essential for a smooth and lawful stay.

### Section 4.1: Arrival at a Russian Airport

The immigration process at a Russian port of entry is straightforward but requires careful attention to detail. The most important document you will handle here is the Migration Card.

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Immigration Control:** As you approach the immigration counter, have your "Arrival Dossier" ready. Present your passport with the valid student visa and your official Invitation Letter to the Border Control officer.
* **Complete the Migration Card:** You will be given a two-part Migration Card to fill out. Complete it carefully and legibly. In the "Purpose of Entry" section, it is crucial to tick or write **"Study" (учеба)**.49
* **Receive Your Stamped Documents:** The officer will stamp your passport with your entry date and will also stamp both parts of your Migration Card. They will retain one part and return the other to you. **This returned portion of the Migration Card is an extremely important legal document. You must keep it safe with your passport at all times.** It is required for your initial migration registration, all subsequent visa extensions, and other official procedures.49
* **Customs and Exit:** After clearing immigration, collect your checked luggage and proceed through customs. You can then use your pre-arranged transport or find official airport taxis or airport express trains to get to your accommodation.

### Section 4.2: The 7-Day Migration Registration Mandate

This is the most urgent and critical administrative task you must complete upon arrival. Under Russian law, all foreign nationals must be registered with the local migration authorities at their place of residence within **seven working days** of their arrival in the country.49 Failure to comply with this strict deadline can result in significant fines and, in severe cases, deportation.50 The responsibility for this registration lies with your host—either the university (for dormitory residents) or your landlord (for private rentals).

This registration is the official act that legalizes your stay in Russia. It is not an optional step. The process must be prioritized above all other settling-in activities. For students planning to rent privately, it is essential to have confirmed in writing, before signing any lease from India, that the landlord understands and agrees to fulfill this legal obligation. An unwilling or uncooperative landlord can place your legal status in jeopardy from the very first week.

**Actionable Steps:**

* **If You Live in a University Dormitory:** This is the most straightforward scenario. Report to the university's International Student Office or the dormitory administration office on the next working day after your arrival. They are experienced in this process and will handle the registration on your behalf. You will need to submit your passport (with the entry stamp) and your Migration Card.49
* **If You Live in Private Accommodation (Rented Apartment):** The legal responsibility to register you falls on the owner of the apartment. You must immediately coordinate with your landlord. You will likely need to accompany them to a local Multifunctional Centre (МФЦ) or a territorial office of the Ministry ofInternal Affairs (ГУВМ МВД) to complete the paperwork. You must provide them with your passport and Migration Card.50 Do not delay in initiating this process.

### Section 4.3: Your First Week To-Do List

Once the urgent migration registration is underway, you can proceed with other essential tasks to set up your new life in Russia.

**Actionable Steps:**

* **Complete University Enrollment:** Visit your faculty's dean's office and the university's international department to complete your final registration. Submit any required original documents from your dossier and receive your official student ID card (*studencheskiy bilet*). This card is important for accessing university facilities and often provides discounts on public transport and at museums.51
* **Open a Russian Bank Account:** With your passport, visa, Migration Card, and proof of migration registration, visit a local bank branch to open a student account. Major banks like Sberbank, Tinkoff, and Raiffeisen are common choices for international students.53 An account is necessary for receiving funds from home and managing local expenses.
* **Initiate Visa Extension:** Your initial 90-day visa needs to be extended into a one-year, multiple-entry visa. The process must be started well in advance—typically at least **45 days before** your current visa expires.50 Consult your university's international office immediately to understand the procedure, required documents, and timelines.
* **Mandatory Medicals and Biometrics:** All foreign citizens staying for over 90 days must undergo a mandatory medical examination, fingerprinting, and photographing (MEFP) procedure.50 Your university will provide guidance on where and when to complete this. This is a legal requirement to maintain your visa status.
* **Get Connected:** Purchase a local Russian SIM card. Major providers like MTS, Beeline, and MegaFon offer affordable plans with good data packages. This is essential for communication and navigating the city.
* **Settle In:** Familiarize yourself with your new neighborhood. Locate the nearest metro station, bus stops, grocery stores (*продукты*), and pharmacies (*аптека*). Explore the campus and connect with student organizations, especially any Indian student associations, which can be an invaluable source of support and community.56

## Conclusion

The journey to studying in Russia is a process defined by meticulous preparation and adherence to strict administrative timelines. From securing the government-issued Invitation Letter to navigating the time-sensitive HIV test and the urgent 7-day migration registration upon arrival, each step is a critical building block for the next. By adopting an organized "dossier mentality" from the outset and planning each phase with care, you can transform this complex procedure into a manageable series of tasks. This comprehensive checklist provides the framework to ensure that every document is in order, every deadline is met, and every requirement is fulfilled. With these preparations complete, you can arrive in Russia confident and ready to embrace the rich academic and cultural experience that awaits.

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