

**Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova
2020**



Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova

An In-depth Study of Three Unsung Countries

Two Departures in 2020 – Premier Series – 14 Days

May 3-16 • August 9-22

Traverse a little-known region that has changed hands from its earliest history, exploring with in-depth visits and local interactions. Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova are three of the least frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Begin in Minsk, capital of Belarus. Having survived innumerable disasters through the ages, including the Crimean Tatar raids and the battles of WWII, Minsk today gives a fascinating glimpse into the socialist past. Pass through monumental Brest, before crossing the border into Ukraine. Continue through Ukraine, visiting three elegant cities – Lviv, Kiev and Odessa. Drive from Odessa to Chisinau, capital of the tiny country of Moldova. Moldova is primarily an agricultural place that is beginning to make a name for itself with its deep red wines. Take a day trip to the Transdnister region, a narrow strip of Moldovan land bordering Ukraine where separatists have declared a disputed independence.



Daily Itinerary

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Day 1, Sunday | Arrive Minsk, Belarus |
| Day 2, Monday | Minsk |
| Day 3, Tuesday | Minsk • Brest |
| Day 4, Wednesday | Brest • Lviv, Ukraine |
| Day 5, Thursday | Lviv |
| Day 6, Friday | Lviv • fly to Kiev |
| Day 7, Saturday | Kiev |
| Day 8, Sunday | Kiev |
| Day 9, Monday | Kiev • fly to Odessa |
| Day 10, Tuesday | Odessa |
| Day 11, Wednesday | Odessa • Chisinau, Moldova |
| Day 12, Thursday | Chisinau |
| Day 13, Friday | Chisinau • day trip to Transdnierster |
| Day 14, Saturday | Depart Chisinau |



MIR Signature Features

- Traverse the little-known countries of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, whose location “between great states” has given them a turbulent and rich heritage.
- Dine with a rural family in the Belarusian countryside.
- Browse the Pharmacy Museum, its walls lined with antique bottles and vessels from years gone by, when medicine was more of an art than a science.
- Learn from an artist in a private studio in Kiev.
- Explore the caves beneath Odessa where Ukrainian partisans took their resistance movement literally underground during WWII.
- Sample home-cooked Moldovan cuisine at a meal in a Chisinau home, and Moldova’s deep red wines at a winery.
- Discover the Soviet time capsule of Tiraspol, capital of the de facto sovereign state of Transdniester.

Tour Highlights

| | |
|----------|---|
| Minsk | Square of Independence, Old Town, Victory Square, Modern Belarusian Art, Park Janki Kupaly, Polish Catholic Church of St. Simon, Nezavisimosty (Independence) Avenue, Ploshcha Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), local market, Khatyn Memorial to 1943 Nazi village massacre, Graveyard Villages, Trees of Life, Memory Wall |
| Kosova | Site of Kosciuszko Manor House, lunch at a farmhouse |
| Brest | Brest Fortress |
| Lviv | Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Prospekt Svobody, Ploshcha Rynok (Market Square), Town Hall, Pharmacy Museum, Lychakiv cemetery, visit with an icon painter, Museum of Folk Architecture and Crafts |
| Kiev | St. Sophia, Pecherskaya Lavra, Dormition Cathedral (all three UNESCO World Heritage Sites), Khreshchatyk Street, Independence Square, cultural performance, Kiev-Mohyla Academy, Podil District, Babi Yar, Chernobyl Museum, visit to an artist’s studio |
| Odessa | Potemkin Steps, Odessa Opera and Ballet Theater (exterior), Vorontsov Palace, Cathedral of the Assumption, Archaeological Museum, Partisan Catacombs |
| Chisinau | Arch of Triumph, Cathedral Park, Government House and Parliament Building, Opera and Ballet Theater, Stefan cel Mare Park, Cricova Winery, Orhei Vechi Cave Monastery, day trip to Transdniester, lunch in a private home |

Daily Itinerary

Day One, Sunday
Arrive Minsk, Belarus

Arrive in Minsk, Belarus and transfer to a centrally located hotel. The afternoon is free to rest and refresh. This evening meet fellow travelers for a **welcome dinner** at a local restaurant.

Meals: D – *Hotel Minsk or similar*



Day Two, Monday

Minsk

After breakfast, start the morning with an introductory tour of Minsk. Minsk is a living testimony to the atrocities of World War II; nearly half of the city's population perished during the war. Almost every building in the city has been erected since 1944, when Minsk's recapture by the Soviet army left barely a stone standing.

Highlights of the tour include the grand **Square of Independence**, the Old Town, Victory Square, the Square of Yakuba Kolosa, Nezavisimosty (Independence) Avenue and Troitskoye Predmestie or Island of Tears.

Minsk's main street, **Nezavisimosty Avenue**, is a huge and animated promenade. At the end of the street, the 1,640-foot long **Ploshcha Nezalezhnosti** (Independence Square) is surrounded with government buildings and the attractive **Polish Catholic Church of St. Simon**. The **Park Janki Kupaly** is a pleasant stretch of greenery bordered on two sides by the snaking Svislach River. It is here that Russia's Communist Party held its illegal founding congress in 1898.



Visit the **Gallery of Russian and Modern Belorussian Art**, taking time to view the modern portion of the collection.

After lunch, pay a visit to **Khatyn**. This village was razed in a Nazi reprisal in 1943 and all of its residents save a handful perished. The site is now a memorial with a sculpture of the only adult survivor, Yuzif Kaminsky. Located nearby are other reminders of Belarus' war suffering – the **Graveyard Villages**, honoring 185 villages that the Nazis annihilated; the **Trees of Life**, remembering 433 other places that were destroyed but rebuilt; and the **Memory Wall**, listing the Nazi concentration camps in Belarus and commemorating their victims.

Return to Minsk and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel Minsk or similar*



Day Three, Tuesday

Minsk • Brest



Following breakfast at the hotel, depart towards Brest, stopping first near the village of Kosova to visit the **Kosciuszko Manor House**, where Tadeusz Kosciuszko (spelled Tadevush Kastsyushka in Belarus) was born. At the time of his birth, the area belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and consequently, Kosciuszko is claimed as a national hero by Belarus, Poland and Lithuania. Celebrated in the U.S. as well, Kosciuszko was named Head Engineer of the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He was a friend of Thomas Jefferson, who called him “as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known.” Continue through the countryside to a rural farmhouse, and stop for lunch. Enjoy the opportunity to

dine with a local family and learn about life in this corner of the world.

After lunch, depart for the border town of Brest. Along the route are many of the small villages that still reflect life in the 19th century. This countryside is known for its great forests, clusters of lakes and networks of streams. Continue on to **Brest**, which was the setting for the March 1918 negotiations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, under which the new Soviet government in Russia surrendered the territories of present-day Belarus, Poland, the Baltics and Ukraine to German control.

Upon arrival in Brest, begin with a city tour of the town center. Visit the massive Brest Fortress and its memorial complex. Czar Nicholas I had the **Brest Fortress** built between 1838 and 1842 on the territory of the Old Town. The crenellated red brick citadel became the main Russian outpost on the western border. In 1941 the garrison at the fortress defended it from the Nazis for a full month before it fell. The fortress today is a museum and memorial to the defenders and to the city of Brest.

Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and the rest of the evening at leisure.

Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel Hermitage, Hampton Hotel, Chalet Greenwood or similar*

Day Four, Wednesday

Brest • Lviv, Ukraine

This morning depart for Ukraine, with lunch en route. At the border undergo required customs and passport formalities and continue to **Lviv**, Ukraine, the “capital” of Western Ukraine and one of the country’s most exhilarating cities. Lviv is brimming with hundreds of Renaissance and baroque buildings and is home to an outstanding opera house. Check in to the hotel upon arrival this evening, and enjoy time to relax at the hotel after the long drive.

Dinner tonight will be at the hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – *Astoria Hotel or similar*



Day Five, Thursday

Lviv

This morning, begin a full day's exploration of **Lviv**. Lviv is one of the the most beautiful cities in Ukraine, having escaped both the devastation of World War II and the Soviet influences prevalent in Eastern Ukraine. Well-preserved buildings from the 16th to the 19th centuries grace the central square of the **Old Town, added in its entirety to the UNESCO World Heritage List** in 1998. The bulk of Lviv's Old Town architecture, built during the 16th and 17th centuries, is heavily influenced by the Italian Renaissance.



Founded in the 13th century by the prince of Galicia on a hill along the east-west trade routes, Lviv was a much-envied strategic center, especially for its control of the Carpathian passes. Conquered by the Poles in 1349, Lviv has a Central European feel. The city came under Moscow's rule for the first time in 1939. Occupied by Germany from 1941 to 1944, and again by the Soviets following WWII, Lviv's ethnic heritage was severely repressed.

Begin exploring on **Prospekt Svobody** (Freedom), a wide, tree-lined boulevard near the **Ploshcha Rynok**, or Market Square. This old cobbled square, surrounded by 16th-18th century merchant dwellings, was the center of social and economic life for hundreds of years. Key attractions on the square are the **19th century Town Hall** and the oldest working pharmacy in the country. Founded in 1735, when it was called an apothecary, this shop is fronted with two bas-reliefs – one of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, and one of his daughter Hygieia, the Greek goddess of health. Inside is the **Pharmacy Museum**, its walls lined with old shelves stacked with little boxes, antique bottles, vessels, scales and other instruments from years gone by when medicine was more of an art than a science. Opened in 1966, the museum exhibits over 2,000 items relating to the search for potions, herbs and concoctions that might cure humankind's ills.



This afternoon's touring continues with a visit to the **Lychakiv Cemetery**, containing almost 100 acres of monuments. Some of them are crowned with sculptures by Ukraine's most prominent artists. Several of Ukraine's most renowned people, such as poet Ivan Franko, are buried here.

Dinner tonight will be independent.
Meals: B, L – *Astoria Hotel or similar*



Day Six, Friday

Lviv • fly to Kiev

This morning, stop by a **local icon painter's workshop** and enjoy the opportunity to speak with the artist, who will show you recent works of his own and of his students.

Afterwards, head out to Lviv's fascinating open-air ethnographic museum. The Shevchenko Hai **Museum of Folk Architecture and Crafts** is a 123-acre forested park outside of Lviv dotted with original wooden buildings from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Grouped into little villages, the houses, churches, barns and mills are furnished with period Ukrainian furniture, clothing, implements and crafts. One of the oldest buildings, the 1763 St. Nicholas Church, was re-erected here in 1930 and the outdoor museum grew around it.

Return to the city and relax with some free time or more time to explore the charming city center.



Arrival in Kiev will be late this evening, with transfer to the hotel and check-in immediately for overnight.
Meals: B, D – *Premier Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Seven, Saturday

Kiev

After breakfast set off to discover **Kiev**, considered the mother city of all Eastern Slavic peoples. Kievan Rus, the state from which Ukraine, Russia and Belarus are all descended, was originally established here in the 9th century.

Discover the Golden Gate. Yaroslav the Wise had Kiev's original **Golden Gate** constructed in the 11th century. The powerful stone gate, beautiful in its time, was the most important in the city, and was impregnable until Batu Khan's armies broke through a different gate and destroyed the Golden Gate from the inside. In 1820, the site was discovered and its ancient ruins protected from the weather. A new ceremonial gate was constructed of brick in 1982, with the most recent restorations completed in 2007.

Next, visit **Mikhailovsky Cathedral**, whose gleaming golden cupolas and clear blue color shine from a bluff overlooking the Dnipro River in

Kiev, where the monastery has been since the Middle Ages. Razed by the Soviets in the 1930s, the cherished cathedral was reconstructed after independence and consecrated in 1999. Legend says that it was in this monastery – originally founded in the 12th century – where Gregory



Photo: Peter Sukonik



Rasputin first made the acquaintance of the Romanovs. Its full name, Mikhailovsky Zlatoverhy, makes reference to its golden domes.

After lunch, continue touring with the **St. Sophia Cathedral and Monastery complex**, now a **UNESCO-listed** museum, housing Sofiysky Sobor, the city's oldest church. It is also the site of the first school and library in Kievan Rus. The rich Byzantine interior is decorated with frescoes and mosaics. Its Orthodox symbology initiated a pattern that was followed by Eastern Slavic churches for 900 years.

Explore the **Podil District**, the historic mercantile and trading quarter of Kiev, with its original buildings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Near the harbor is the one-domed St. Elias Church, said to have been built on the site of Kiev's first wooden church. The first higher education institution in Ukraine, the **Kiev-Mohyla Academy**, was established in 1615. A hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism, it was closed by the czars and only reopened in 1992, following the new independence of Ukraine. Today it is a modern university, with online scientific libraries and international language programs.

Continue at the **Chernobyl Museum**, explaining the combination of human error and design flaws responsible for the 1986 explosion and fire at Reactor #4, only 62 miles from Kiev. The reactor, put into commission only three years earlier, exploded and burned during a shutdown, blowing tons of radioactive material into the atmosphere. This small, compelling museum offers a modern re-creation of the events of that day, and shows the path of the radiation and the mass evacuations that eventually relocated over 300,000 people from Ukraine and Belarus. The nuclear accident and its subsequent cover-up marked the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.



Take the Metro to Kiev's **Khreshchatyk Street**, to see this main street lined with neoclassical public buildings, cafés and lots of upscale shopping. On weekends and holidays, Khreshchatyk becomes a pedestrian thoroughfare, dedicated to shopping, strolling, people-watching and street performers.

Return to the hotel via Instytutska Street and **Maidan Square**. Over four days in February 2014, 84 Maidan protesters were killed, many of them on this spot. This section of the street has been renamed "Alley of the Heavenly Hundred," in honor of the total death toll of 104 protesters killed during the revolution. Learn about the peaceful protests that began in November 2013, eventually leading to the violence that killed so many protesters and finally forcing then-President Yanukovich to flee the country.

Dinner will be at a local restaurant before overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B, L, D – *Premier Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Eight, Sunday Kiev

This morning, stop by **ousted President Viktor Yanukovich's mansion compound** on the outskirts of Kiev, complete with a full-size galleon floating on a man-made lake, a classic car collection, private zoo and golden bathroom fixtures. Many of those living in a country with a per capita income of approximately \$7,300 take a dim view of these excesses.



After lunch, take the opportunity to learn **traditional egg-painting at an artist's studio**. Literally translated as egg-writing, this folk craft has been elevated to an art in Ukraine. Each pattern has a different meaning, some of them dating back to pagan times. An artist leads you step-by-step through drawing the pattern, coating the egg in hot wax and dipping it in colored dyes. Each participant comes away with his/her own decorated egg.

Visit the moving **memorial to the victims of the 1932-33 man-made famine** when Ukraine was under Soviet rule. A bronze sculpture of a starving child, the memorial shows the human tragedy engendered by Stalin's policies of collectivization and extreme appropriations of the food grown in Ukraine during that time. Stalin also closed the borders so that starving Ukrainians could not escape their fate. Due to a lack of record keeping, the exact death toll is still debated, with estimates ranging between 2.4-7.5 million. On November 22, 2008, the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, President Victor Yuschchenko inaugurated the monument to the victims.

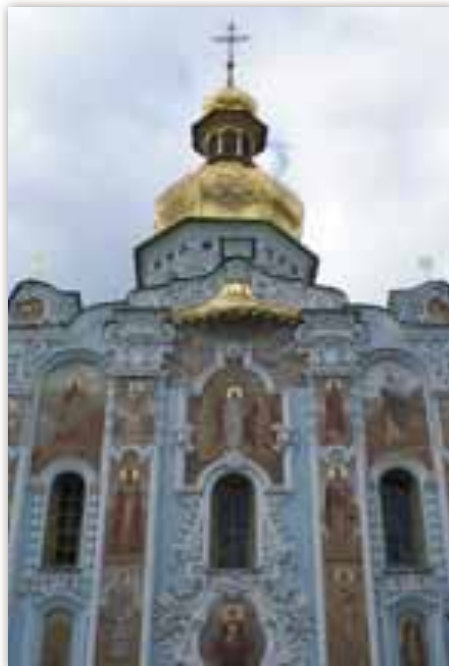
Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant, and schedules should permit a **cultural performance** this evening.

Meals: B, L, D – *Premier Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Nine, Monday

Kiev • fly to Odessa

After breakfast at the hotel, spend another day exploring Kiev and its environs.



Visit the **UNESCO-listed Pecherskaya Lavra** – also known as the Caves Monastery – Kievan Rus' first monastery, founded in 1051. The monks dug caves and underground labyrinths, living and studying in them, and their mummified bodies still line the walls. Here the historian-monk Nestor compiled much of the earliest known history of the Slavs, *The Tale of Bygone Days*, and passed on the crafts of icon-painting and building. The **Dormition (meaning Ascension) Cathedral** was built from 1073 to 1089 on the monastery grounds. Kiev's second great Byzantine church, the Dormition Cathedral was the model for the early 12th century churches of Russia's Golden Ring towns.

Have a late lunch before continuing to **Babi Yar**, a peaceful ravine where in September 1941, Nazi troops massacred 34,000 Kievan Jews in a 48-hour period. From 1941 to 1943 the Nazis operated a concentration camp, Syrets, at this same location. The area was set aside as a memorial in 1976 honoring over 100,000 people killed here, including Jews, Gypsies and partisans. In 1991, a special memorial for the Jewish victims was dedicated at Babi Yar.

Next, continue on to the Kiev airport for your evening flight to Odessa. Upon arrival, check in to the hotel for the night.

Meals: B, L – *Duke Hotel or similar*



Day Ten, Tuesday

Odessa

Following breakfast, begin a city tour of the third largest city in Ukraine. After southern Ukraine with its coveted Black Sea coast was ceded to Russia by the Ottoman Turks in 1792, Catherine the Great founded a naval base and strategic fort here, naming it **Odessa** after an ancient Greek city believed to be in the area. Odessa quickly grew into a thriving merchant port as well, shipping the abundant Ukrainian grain around the world. Always considered a cultural center, Odessa has produced some of the world's finest classical performers, and may be best known for its **Potemkin Steps**, immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein's film, *Battleship Potemkin*. The steps were built in 1837 as a monument to the Duke de

Richelieu and are the best place to view Odessa's busy harbor and waterfront.



Take in the exterior of the elaborate Viennese-designed **Odessa Opera and Ballet Theater**, one of the most beautiful opera houses in Europe; the **Vorontsov Palace**, the residence built in 1826 for a city governor; and the striking blue and white **Cathedral of the Assumption** with five domes and a bell tower.

Tour Odessa's **Archaeological Museum**. Ukraine's oldest museum, the Archaeological Museum displays artifacts excavated from burial mounds along the Black Sea coast. Scythian gold and 10th century Slavic coins are found in the Gold Room along with a gold vase from the 14th century BC.

After lunch, continue the tour of Odessa by exploring the catacombs underneath the city. The **Odessa Partisan Catacombs** were formed as quarrymen with horses cut and dragged blocks of limestone from beneath the city to build most of Odessa's palaces and government buildings. The tunnels, possibly five hundred miles of them, can be found everywhere under the city and its suburbs. Odessa's wealthy residents found that the temperature and humidity of the tunnels were perfect for storing wine, and its smugglers found they were perfect for storing and moving contraband. The most well-known of the tunnels' uses, however, was during WWII, when Axis forces overran the city and the Ukrainian partisans took their resistance movement literally underground.

Return to the hotel in the late afternoon. Dinner tonight will be at a nearby restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D – Duke Hotel or similar

Day Eleven, Wednesday

Odessa • Chisinau, Moldova

This morning after breakfast depart for Moldova. After a possibly lengthy customs and passport procedure at the border, continue on to the **capital, Chisinau**.

Sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, Moldova is primarily an agricultural country. Ethnically and linguistically related to Romania, Moldova was originally known as a geographical area called Bessarabia, which also claimed part of Romania. This region was annexed by the Soviets, who formally created the



Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1940. Most of the finer buildings date from the revival that came with the Russian occupation of the early 19th century, including the cathedral, triumphal arch and the 13-ton bell which was cast from a captured Turkish cannon.

Spend the afternoon touring **Chisinau**. First mentioned in the 15th century when it was founded around a monastery, Chisinau has seen a variety of invasions by the Turks and Tatars. The majority of

modern Chisinau is comprised of 1950s-style Soviet architecture, much of which was initiated or overseen by Leonid Brezhnev who, as First Secretary under Stalin, ran the new republic from 1950-1952.



A tour of Chisinau includes the **Arch of Triumph**, built in 1846 and restored in 1973; the **Cathedral Park** from 1836; the **Government House and Parliament Building**; the **Opera and Ballet Theater**; and **Stefan cel Mare Park**. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant. Meals: B, L, D – *Radisson Blu, Vispas Hotel or similar*

Day Twelve, Thursday **Chisinau**

Today is spent touring Chisinau's environs. Among Moldova's greatest treasures are its monasteries. Most extraordinary among them is the **Cave Monastery in Orhei Vechi**. Orthodox Christian monks who believed the cave would be a fortress against invaders excavated this 13th century church from a limestone cliff. Archaeologists have recently discovered ruins of Turkish baths and a 15th century protective wall that surrounds the religious complex. The Cave Monastery was inhabited until the 18th century. Closed during Soviet times, it was re-opened in 1996, and services are now held regularly.

After **lunch with a local family**, learn more about winemaking in Moldova, a venerable art and an essential part of the people's life and culture. Climatic conditions and the area's soil composition allow Moldovans to grow diverse grape varieties and produce a rich range of table wines. Explore one of the largest underground wine cellars in the world at the Moldovan wine producer, **Cricova**. The miles of tunnels were excavated in the 15th century and the limestone carted off to help build Chisinau. Since 1954 the Cricova winery has used the tunnels to store their products in the constant temperature and humidity of the underground labyrinth. The cellars include a priceless collection of pre-WWII wines as well as the renowned wines of Cricova.

Return to Chisinau for an independent dinner and overnight.
Meals: B, L – *Radisson Blu, Vispas Hotel or similar*



Day Thirteen, Friday

Chisinau • day trip to Transdniestria

Take a day trip to the **Transdniestria region**, a narrow strip of Moldovan land bordering Ukraine where separatists have declared a disputed independence. Organized as a de facto presidential republic with a parliament and all the attributes of a sovereign state, Transdniestria is in the unique position of being recognized as a separate state only by the partially-recognized states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Populated by a majority of Russian and Ukrainian speakers who feared that the newly-independent Moldova would merge with Romania, Transdniestria gives the traveler a glimpse back into Soviet times. Explore the time capsules of Tiraspol, the region's capital, and Bender, taking time to converse with local people to hear their perspective.

Moldova's second largest city, **Tiraspol** is located on the bank of the Dniester River, and has a majority population of Russians, with Ukrainians second and Moldovans third. Take a walk on October 25 Street, noting the multiple statues of Lenin, including known for its rare "flying coat" appearance, and the Soviet-style banners. Pass by the Tank-34 monument and the statues of military genius Suvarov and literary genius Pushkin. Pause at the central post office where you can buy Transdniestrian stamps and postcards.

In **Bender** visit the remains of the massive Ottoman fortress built by Suleiman the Magnificent in the 1530s. Bender Fortress was attacked many times before it was finally overcome by the Russians in the late 18th century.

Return to Chisinau this evening for a festive farewell dinner, and to pack and prepare in anticipation of departure tomorrow.

Meals: B, L, D – *Radisson Blu, Vispas Hotel or similar*

Day Fourteen, Saturday

Depart Chisinau

Following breakfast at the hotel the tour concludes with transfers to the airport for departure.

Meals: B

Dates for 2020 – Two Departures – Premier Series

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note that you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to the tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

May 3-16, 2020

August 9-22, 2020

Package Prices – 2020

5-16 passengers, \$7,495 per person, double occupancy

Plus internal air \$250 (economy class, subject to change)

Single supplement \$1,345



Land Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- 13 breakfasts, 11 lunches and 10 dinners, per the itinerary. Other meals are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff, including a MIR Tour Manager.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private van or coach (size of vehicle depends on group size).
- Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Baggage handling where available.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* hand-book with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- Internal airfare (internal airfare is quoted separately and is subject to change by airlines).
- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1.877.709.5596.



Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021– Two Departures – Premier Series

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Next year's dates and prices are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

May 2-15, 2021
August 8-21, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

5-16 passengers, \$7,595 per person, double occupancy
Plus internal air \$275 (economy class, subject to change)
Single supplement \$1,395

Premier Series

MIR's Premier Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. While all MIR trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels, Premier Series programs take advantage of five-star or best in class properties along the way wherever possible.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

The accommodations vary from basic hotels in Belarus to very comfortable four and five star hotels elsewhere in the itinerary. It is important to keep in mind that the countries of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, and availability and quality of public restrooms. You are traveling in some areas which, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be the most comfortable possible for travel in this region, it is rated as **rigorous touring** because of the daily walking involved, the length of some bus rides and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets are of cobblestone, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases; museums rarely have elevators. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of your trip.

Every effort has been made to make the information in this schedule accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We will do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, this may not always be possible. Only those willing to accept these conditions should consider joining this program.



Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Belarus here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/belarus-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Ukraine here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/ukraine-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Moldova here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/moldova-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Weather

This region of Central/East Europe enjoys a traditional continental climate with warm summers and fairly mild winters. Spring and summer are the best times to travel to these destinations, particularly when traveling overland by coach. These are all agriculturally based countries and the beautiful landscapes are dotted with cultivated fields, trees and flowers. Expect temperatures from 65-85 degrees Fahrenheit on both departures. Rain is also possible. We recommend checking temperature ranges online. Research using sites such as Weatherbase, available online at www.weatherbase.com, will help you get a snapshot of daily average temperatures as well as precipitation days and more

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to the region.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

At this time, only one country on this itinerary requires a visa for U.S. passport holders, Belarus. A Ukrainian and/or Moldovan visa **may be required** for citizens of other countries. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour, such as Russia.



An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$189. Your exact visa fees may differ as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time, and return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change.

Visa processing for this tour will generally take about 1-2 weeks. Travelers should prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel extensively in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing, depending on your plans. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for these visas, which requires a foreign government approval authorization to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassies/Consulates. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR's preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visas service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss it with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems. **In the event that you plan to process visas without going through MIR's preferred provider, please contact us first so we can pass you detailed instructions with critical trip-specific information.**

Pre- or Post-Tours

MIR can arrange for an extended program in Minsk before the tour begins, or after it ends in Chisinau. We can also arrange for an extended program in Moscow, St. Petersburg, the Baltics or Central/East Europe at either end of your tour.

It is also possible to combine this tour with the **Kaliningrad & the Baltics** tour, **April 20-May 2, 2020** (an easy transfer by private car from Vilnius to Minsk and an additional night in Minsk (both at additional expense) connect these two trips beautifully). Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Also Nearby...

For more tours to this region, you may want to check out:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Baltics, 7 days. Take an overland survey of the Baltic capitals, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, exploring the centers of their UNESCO-listed Old Towns. The hearts of these cities feature cobbled streets, red-tiled roofs and robust old churches and fortress walls. Admire the lush farms and winding rivers between the cities, and pay visits to important rural sites like Lithuania's Hill of Crosses and Latvia's baroque Rundale Castle.

Essential Ukraine, 8 days. Ukraine is the new borderland between Europe and Russia. Spend eight days exploring this resilient region influenced by Polish princes and Lithuanian lords, by Cossack *hetmen* and Turkish khans, by Russian communists and by Ukrainian poets and nationalists.

Essential St. Petersburg, 7 days. St. Petersburg, home of the czars and their courts, is a rich repository of extravagant palaces, brilliant museums and renowned theaters overflowing with music and dance. Its fashionable boulevards and serene canals glisten in the "White Nights" of summer and dazzle on sunny winter days.



Essential Russia, 7 days. A compact and compelling survey of Russia's political capital, Moscow, and its cultural capital, St. Petersburg, this tour communicates the character of Western Russia in a succinct and meaningful series of experiences.

Essential Balkans, 14 days. Visit seven Balkan countries in 14 days on this compact overland journey through history. A remarkably complex region, the mountainous Balkan Peninsula is fascinating, diverse and incredibly beautiful.

Small Group Tours

Kaliningrad & The Baltics, 13 days. This overland journey roves the countryside and urban centers of four distinct nations: the three independent Baltic countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – and Kaliningrad, an exclave of Russia.

Bulgaria & Romania: Frescoes & Fortresses, 16 days. Explore the complex history and fascinating culture of Bulgaria and Romania, two Balkan countries whose rugged terrain and consequent isolation have helped preserve their heritage. Discover the luminous frescoes of the painted monasteries, breathe in the fragrance of the Valley of the Roses, and spend an afternoon visiting with villagers in a tiny Transylvanian town.

Russia's Imperial Capitals & Ancient Villages, 11 days. Discover where Russian art, architecture and culture began. In between the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, experience the Russian countryside. The oldest and loveliest churches in Russia, Sergiev Posad's wooden crafts and Fedoskino's glowing lacquer boxes all put a shine on Russia's Golden Ring.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation in a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Air fares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR's receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary).

MIR Small Group Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:

61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750

31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;

30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.



References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).

30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.

Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the "Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth" by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books such as *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.






More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.

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