



Castles of Transylvania
Istanbul to Budapest by Private Train
2020



Castles of Transylvania by Private Train **Istanbul to Budapest Aboard the *Golden Eagle Danube Express***

One northbound departure in 2020 – Private Rail Journey – 7 Days

July 1-7, 2020

Take a short and sweet week-long rail journey that begins in historic Istanbul, heads north through beautiful Bulgaria and Romania's Transylvania region, and rolls on to sophisticated Budapest. Explore alluring capital cities, walk the halls of palaces and royal castles from a range of eras and empires, and watch the unfamiliar world of the Carpathian Mountains and the Hungarian Plain stream past your own cozy private cabin.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Wednesday, July 1
Day 2, Thursday, July 2
Day 3, Friday, July 3
Day 4, Saturday, July 4
Day 5, Sunday, July 5
Day 6, Monday, July 6
Day 7, Tuesday, July 7

Arrive Istanbul, Turkey
Istanbul • board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*
Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria
Sinaia, Romania • Brasov
Sighisoara • Sibiu
Kecksemet, Hungary • Lajosmizse • Budapest
Depart Budapest



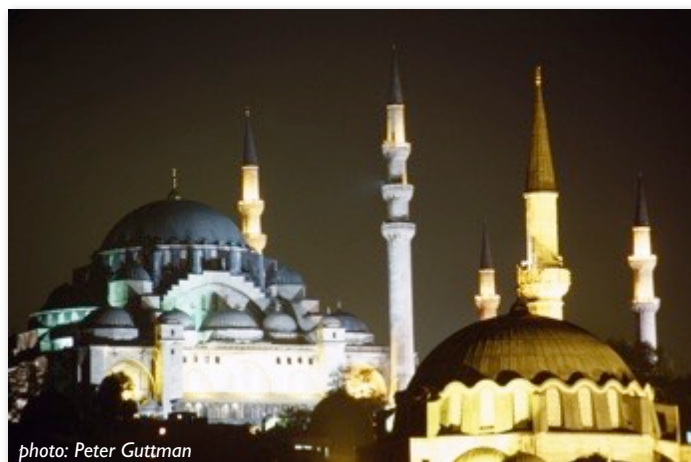
Tour Features

- Enjoy the comfort and efficiency of your own private cabin on the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* luxury train.
- Survey a series of fascinating cities along the rail line.
- Join travelers from around the world to enjoy the casual and relaxed atmosphere aboard the private train, dining in luxury and chatting over drinks in the lounge.
- Relax deeply as you are carried into other lands, a world away from home.

Tour Highlights

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Istanbul | (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace |
| Veliko Tarnovo | Tsarevets Hill Royal Fortress, winding cobbled streets |
| Sinaia | Peles Castle |
| Brasov | Bran Castle ("Dracula's Castle") |
| Sighisoara | Historic Centre/Citadel area (UNESCO World Heritage Site), clock tower, House of Dracula's father |
| Sibiu | Old town, Council Tower |
| Kecskemet | Central square with world renowned art nouveau architecture, <i>Puszta</i> horse show |

Itinerary



Day One, Wednesday, July 1

Arrive Istanbul, Turkey

Upon arrival to Turkey, transfer to the iconic five star Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah. The hotel was built in 1892 to cater to guests taking the *Orient Express*, and it was here that Agatha Christie wrote her famous book *Murder on the Orient Express*. It is a fitting grand hotel for the beginning of this tour.

First named Byzantium, **Istanbul** was renamed Constantinople by Roman Emperor Constantine, who moved the capital here in 330 AD. The Roman Empire evolved into the Byzantine Empire, profoundly influenced by the area's Greek-

speaking inhabitants. The Byzantine Empire reigned for over a thousand years until the Ottoman Turks, originally from Central Asia, conquered Constantinople in 1453 and renamed the city yet again.

Later this evening, gather for a **welcome reception and dinner** to meet fellow travelers.

Meals: D – *Petra Palace Hotel Jumeirah* or similar



Day Two, Thursday, July 2
Istanbul • board the Danube Express

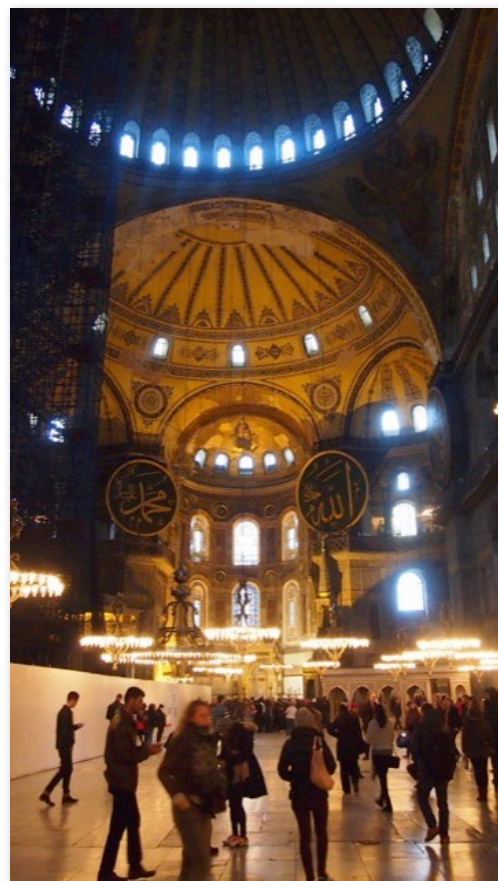
Spend the day touring Turkey's cultural capital. Istanbul's entire **Old Town – Sultanahmet – is UNESCO-listed** and includes the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia. Admire the legendary **Blue Mosque**, soaring upwards with its six minarets and layered domes. Built between 1609 and 1616 at the behest of Ottoman emperor Ahmed I, the mosque was purposely situated on the site of the former Byzantine emperors' Great Palace. Its spacious interior is decorated with blue porcelain tiles.

Continue to **Hagia Sophia**, originally built by Byzantine Emperor Justinian around 537. Its immense dome stands 55 meters above the ground, supported by 40 huge ribs made of special hollow bricks. Colored stone from around the world was brought to Constantinople to decorate the church, and 30 million tiny mosaic tiles adorn the interior.

Visit **Topkapi Palace**, the Great Palace of the Ottoman Sultans from the 15th-19th centuries. Mehmet the Conqueror began the palace complex soon after he won the city from the Byzantine Empire, and it grew and changed over the hundreds of years that it was in use. There are four main courtyards, including the treasury and the palace kitchens, which display a wonderful collection of Chinese celadon porcelain.

Board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* private train late this afternoon and enjoy dinner on board as it heads north towards Bulgaria and Romania.

Meals: B, L, D – *Danube Express private train*



Day Three, Friday, July 3
Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

Arrive in **Veliko Tarnovo**, Bulgaria's ancient capital, inhabited since the Paleolithic Age. Thracians and Romans settled here before the 2nd century AD, and the city became the capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire just after its founding in 1186. The **remains of the Royal Fortress** still stand at the top of Tsarevets Hill. The town was conquered and razed by the Turks in 1393, but remained a center of Bulgarian national struggle. The houses of Veliko Tarnovo seem to grow out of each other's roofs. Here, explore the preserved remains of the Royal Fortress and take time to wander the streets of the ancient city.

Return to the train and enjoy a drink in the lounge car and dinner on board as the journey continues across the Great Hungarian Plain towards Transylvania.

Meals: B, L, D – *Danube Express private train*



Day Four, Saturday, July 4

Sinaia, Romania • Brasov

After an overnight journey through the Carpathian Mountains, arrive this morning at the town of **Sinaia** in the Prahova Valley. Sinaia is Romania's most popular ski resort and a gateway to the beautiful Bugeci Mountains. Winter sports, including a 5,000-foot bobsledding run, and excellent summer hiking and climbing make Sinaia a year-round destination.

In 1870, King Carol I built his summer residence, **Peles Castle**, here, guaranteeing the town fame and fortune. The estate is now one of Romania's most important museums and the final resting place of several Romanian monarchs, including King Carol I, King Ferdinand and Queen Maria. Inaugurated in 1883, Peles combines elements of the German and Gothic Renaissance that bring to mind the extravagant Bavarian castles of King Ludwig. Seven terraces surround the castle's 160 rooms, which are opulently decorated with leather, ebony, walnut and mother-of-pearl and display invaluable collections of art and furnishings.



Return to the train for lunch on board before making an afternoon stop in **Brasov**, an old Transylvanian town set at the foot of a mountain and filled with medieval architecture, cobbled streets and small houses.

Here, visit **Bran Castle**, more commonly known as "**Dracula's Castle**," although despite a popular myth, it was not actually built by Vlad Tepes, the Wallachian prince upon whom the 19th century novelist Bram Stoker is supposed to have based his vampire count. This 14th century castle in the center of Bran village was in fact built by the people of Brasov in 1382 to defend the Bran mountain pass against Turks. Bran Castle embodies the Gothic image of a

Transylvanian castle, and as a result draws crowds from far and wide. After a tour, enjoy a festive dinner in the illustrious castle.

Meals: B, L, D – *Danube Express private train*

Day Five, Sunday, July 5

Sighisoara • Sibiu

Arrive in **Sighisoara** and take a walking tour of this UNESCO-listed medieval town in the heart of Transylvania. Built by German Saxons, Sighisoara is considered the most beautiful and complete medieval architectural ensemble in Romania. In the 13th century, Hungarian overlords granted the Saxons land here in return for help defending the area from the Tatars. The Saxons typically built compact villages centered by fortified churches.

The tour begins at the entrance to the citadel, under the massive 210-foot clock tower. Continue along the square to the house of Vlad Dracul, Vlad the Impaler's father, and then take the Scholar's Stairway up to the 14th century Gothic Church on the Hill.





Return to the train for lunch as you continue to **Sibiu**, an early Saxon walled town in Transylvania. Established in the 12th century and razed by the Tatars in 1241, Sibiu has two levels. The "upper town", surrounded by remnants of the 15th century defensive walls, contains most of Sibiu's historic sights. The "lower town" is a charming array of Sibiu's oldest houses and cobbled squares. Connecting the upper and lower towns are dozens of tunnels, stairways and hidden passages. The large medieval square Piata Mare is at the heart of the city and began life in 1411 as a corn market. Today it is home to many shops and cafes as well as museums.

Return to the train and enjoy a farewell dinner on board as the journey continues across the Great Hungarian Plain.

Meals: B, L, D – *Danube Express private train*

Day Six, Monday, July 6

Kecskemet, Hungary • Lajosmizse • Budapest

This morning, enjoy an opportunity to explore **Kecskemet**, a fascinating city at the geographic center of Hungary. Kecskemet is renowned for the wonderful art nouveau buildings surrounding its central square; for its special apricot brandy, called

barack palinka, and for being the birthplace of Zoltan Kodaly; one of Hungary's most famous composers.

After touring, settle back into your cabin as the train heads for **Lajosmizse** for a spectacular **Pusztá horse show**. On the vast grassy Hungarian Plain, the area called the *puszta* – a word meaning barren or empty – is an environment partially created over two millennia by humans and their herds. Hungarians, descended from the 8th century nomadic Magyars, have been traditionally known for their brilliant horsemanship.

In the late afternoon, the train arrives at its final stop: UNESCO-listed **Budapest**. Built in the grand style of the Hapsburgs, this European capital has a legacy of fine baroque, neoclassical and art nouveau buildings and broad avenues. Three different cities united in 1873 to form Budapest, the Hungarian capital on the Danube River. Obuda (Old Buda), the oldest and smallest of the three, had been settled since the Stone Age. The Romans built a town here named Aquincum, in honor of the many hot mineral springs in the area. Hungarian, or Magyar, people conquered Obuda around 900, and after the Mongol invasion of 1241, moved the town south to the high ground above the river. They called their new capital Buda, and the nobles built their homes and palaces here.

Pest was a trade city on the low side of the Danube. Originally a Celtic settlement, it went through a period as a Roman town like Obuda, but grew in importance after 1222. This was when King Andras decreed that the annual assembly of nobles should be held on the plain.

The sophisticated rail journey comes to an end with a farewell dinner at a Budapest restaurant, and an overnight at the five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace Hotel. Housed in one of the finest examples of art nouveau architecture in Europe, the hotel's grand entranceway and beautifully appointed rooms –



many with a view of the Danube – transport guests back in time from the moment they check in.

Meals: B, L, D – *Four Seasons Gresham Palace Hotel*

Day Seven, Tuesday, July 7

Depart Budapest

The tour ends this morning after breakfast at the hotel, with departure transfers to the airport.

Meals: B

Please note, there is no scheduled sightseeing itinerary in Budapest on this program. If you would like to add some time to explore the city, contact us to discuss your options.



About The Golden Eagle Danube Express Train

Train accommodations

Two styles of accommodation are available on board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*: Superior Deluxe Class (en suite, with UK king bed), and Deluxe Class (en suite).

Superior Deluxe Class

The Superior Deluxe Class on the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* is the ultimate in luxury European rail accommodation, featuring only four modern en suite cabins per car, complete with WiFi access. Deluxe cabins include a full-length sofa and two chairs, a double wardrobe, individually controlled air-conditioning, USB ports, power sockets, personal safe, and a newly designed en suite bathroom with its own shower cubicle. At night, your attendant transforms the sofa into a king-sized bed. The two picture windows, one of which opens, bring light and air into your private retreat.

Superior Deluxe Class Cabin information:

- 93 sq. ft. cabin area,
- Sleeps 2 in UK standard king-sized bed (6 ft. 2 in. by 5 ft.)
- Armchair, full-length sofa
- Sitting area with free standing chairs and table
- Individually controlled air-conditioning
- 2 large picture windows – 1 opens partially
- Adjustable lighting
- Double wardrobe
- Personal safe
- WiFi
- 2 USB ports
- Electrical outlets
- Private en suite bathroom with shower cubicle
- Slippers and toiletries
- Towels and linens changed every three days
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water
- Beer, wine and soft drinks from the Bar Car included (excluding Premium Wine List)

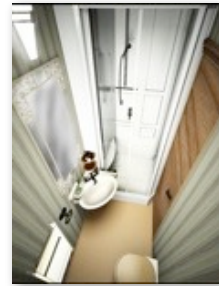
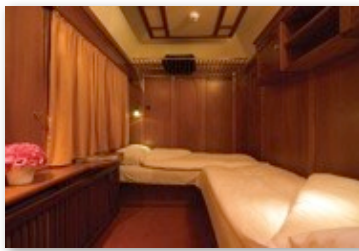


Deluxe Class

The Deluxe Class on the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* features newly designed air-conditioned cabins which pair luxury with utility, offering superior accommodations that feature two lower berths and fully en suite facilities. Cabins are furnished with two sofas, an armchair, table and a wardrobe with a safe. Your attendant will convert the two sofas into comfortable twin beds for nighttime use. The en suite bathroom features a shower, hair dryer and heated towel rack.

Deluxe Class Cabin information:

- 83 sq. ft. cabin area
- Sleeps 2 in two twin size beds (6 ft. 3 in. by 2 ft. 7.5 in.)
- Two armchairs, and sitting area with free standing chair
- Individually controlled air-conditioning
- Large picture window – opens partially
- Full length wardrobe
- Personal safe
- Electrical outlets
- Private en suite bathroom with shower and heated towel bar
- Slippers and toiletries
- Towels and linens changed every three days
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water available morning to night
- Beer, wine and soft drinks from the Bar Car included (excluding Premium Wine List)
- 5 cabins per carriage



Note: cabin configurations and decor may vary from samples depicted



Dates for 2020 – Private Rail Journey

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

July 1-7, 2020

2020 Package Prices

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:

| | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Deluxe Class, twin share | \$9,495 |
| Deluxe Class, single | \$15,995 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Superior Deluxe Class, twin share | \$11,395 |
| Superior Deluxe Class, single | \$19,195 |

Private Train Tour Deposits – Per person

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Deluxe Class deposit | \$2,500 |
| Superior Deluxe Class deposit | \$5,500 |

A non-refundable deposit and completed reservation form/signed release are required to hold space.

Land Tour Includes

- Accommodation aboard the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* private train.
- Hotel accommodation per the itinerary (1 night in Istanbul, 1 night in Budapest).
- All meals starting with dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on final tour day.
- A generous allowance of wine or local beer, soft drinks and water with all lunches and dinners.
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water round the clock from your car attendant while on board the train.
- Complimentary draft beer in the Bar Car for all passengers.
- Arrival/departure transfers, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates and in the tour start/end cities.
- All guided off-train tours per itinerary.
- The services of an experienced Train Tour Manager, with local guides for scheduled off-train touring.
- All gratuities.
- Baggage handling.

Not Included

- International airfare or surface transport to the point of joining/leaving the tour. MIR is able to arrange your air itinerary in economy or business class. If you wish to obtain an air quote, please contact us for details.
- Items of a purely personal nature (laundry, telephone, bar account, photography at museums, etc.)
- Optional pre- or post-tour extensions.



- Drinks, beyond draft beer in the Bar Car, and beer and wine at set meals.
- Visa fees, any excess baggage charges, airport departure taxes, vaccination or medical costs.
- 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 – Rail Journey by Private Train

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 are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

June 24-30, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:

| | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Deluxe Class, twin share | \$9,995 |
| Deluxe Class, single | \$14,995 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Superior Deluxe Class, twin share | \$12,495 |
| Superior Deluxe Class, single | \$20,995 |

Private Train Tour Deposits – Per person

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Deluxe Class deposit | \$2,500 |
| Superior Deluxe Class deposit | \$5,500 |

Rail Journey by Private Train

Private Train tours are in a class of their own, offering the opportunity to experience remote destinations in unparalleled style. These all-inclusive, overview tours aboard the fully-chartered *Danube Express* private train bring together passengers from around the world. Group sizes are flexible and on the *Danube Express* private train can be up to 90 passengers.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

- This trip is moderately active, and rated **moderate to rigorous** touring due to the daily walking involved and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. 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 this trip.



- This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets and sidewalks are uneven, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators.
- On the train, restaurant and bar cars may be some distance from your sleeping car. Although portage is provided where possible, you may have to carry your baggage for short distances.
- Passengers may encounter problems getting on and off trains; there may be low platforms, steep steps and/or gaps between the platform and the train.
- In true expedition style, some delays or changes in the itinerary are likely.

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

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 Europe enjoys a transitional maritime/continental climate, with warm summers and fairly mild winters. In June, temperatures typically range from lows in the mid to upper 50s to highs in the mid to upper 70s.

Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region you will be visiting.

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 published fares available. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel, 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. Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 for further details and for assistance with custom air reservations from your preferred departure city.

Visas

U.S. passport holders do not require visas for any of the countries visited on this itinerary. You may need a visa for any country you fly through prior to joining the tour, or for a country in which you plan to do a pre- or post-tour extension. Non-U.S. passport holder may need a visa for one or more of the countries on the main tour routing. Please call with any questions about processing visas for this program.



Pre and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for an extended program in Russia or Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus or the 'Stans. Contact us for more information.

Also Nearby...

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

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

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.

Essential Caucasus, 10 days. Armenia’s intricate stone *khachkar* crosses, the bounteous wines of Georgia and the ancient petroglyphs of Azerbaijan are icons of these three intertwined Caucasus countries, where you can experience five UNESCO masterpieces in ten days.

Essential Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 13 days. Explore the markets, mosques and minarets of oasis towns on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts. Here spiritual beliefs were the greatest commodities to flow along trade routes, and civilizations blossomed amidst austere natural beauty.

Essential Uzbekistan, 10 days. Roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, along with modern Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. Admire their mosques, *madrassahs* and minarets built of mudbricks and clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

Essential Turkmenistan, 12 days. From the golden monuments of Ashgabat and the ruins of Parthian Nisa, head into the mountains to overnight in a village home. Visit the Caspian seaport, Turkmenbashi, explore UNESCO-listed Merv, and learn about traditional crafts. Camp at the “Door to Hell” and survey Kunya-Urgench, ancient capital of Khorezm.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on 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

Please note that no partial refunds are available for any missed days of a tour or any whole or part of a tour, accommodation, meal or any other service not utilized by the participant during the tour. The quoted price represents a package price for the services offered and an itemization of individual component costs will not be provided. Please understand there will be no exceptions to our cancellation policies regardless of your situation. Should you need to cancel your travel plans, please notify us in writing immediately. At the time we receive written notification of cancellation, the following charges apply:

Scheduled Rail Journeys by Private Train:

121 or more days prior to departure-----deposit due or paid in full of \$2,000, \$2,500 or \$5,500
65-120 days prior to departure-----50% of the land tour cost
64 days prior to departure 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 like *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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