



Essential Azerbaijan 2020



Essential Azerbaijan

Highlights of Azerbaijan

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 7 Days

Your choice of dates, start any day of the week

Azerbaijan is most commonly thought of for its present role as a major oil and natural gas producer. Its shiny veneer belies its ancient history and the competing influences that have impacted it over the centuries. Located at the crossroads of Central Asia, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, Azerbaijan is a country like few others: a state of many traditions, but very much proud of its own identity and independence. Explore both the modern and the old on this seven-day journey from the capital of Baku through the mountains and valleys of the Caucasus and back again. Marvel at ultra-modern museums and skyscrapers, ancient mosques, churches, and a Zoroastrian Temple, UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as the Gobustan Petroglyphs.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Baku, Azerbaijan
Day 2	Baku
Day 3	Baku
Day 4	Baku • Mazara • Shemakha • Lahij • Sheki
Day 5	Sheki
Day 6	Sheki • Nij • Baku
Day 7	Depart Baku



Tour Highlights

Baku	"Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah Palace and Maiden Tower" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Azerbaijan Carpet Museum, Fountain Square, Bibi-Heybat Mosque, Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center
Mazara	Diri Baba Mausoleum
Shemakha	Yogurt and Butter Demonstration, Yeddi Gumbaz Masoleum
Lahij	Copper Master's Studio
Sheki	Caravanserai, Khan's Summer Palace, Local Artist's Workshop, Kish Village
Nij	Orthodox Albanian Church of St. Elesei
Gobustan	"Rock Art Cultural Landscape" (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

Daily Itinerary

Day One

Arrive Baku, Azerbaijan

Arrive in Baku and transfer to the hotel. Travelers who arrive early enough in the afternoon will have free time to explore the area by the hotel. No touring is scheduled for today, to allow for a variety of arrival times. Time may permit meeting your guide this evening for a **brief orientation**; if not, the orientation will be done before touring begins tomorrow.

Meals: Independent – *Shah Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Two

Baku

After breakfast this morning, begin with a full day of touring the **city of Baku**. The **capital city of Azerbaijan** was first mentioned in the 9th century, and its people were reported to burn oil that came from the ground in their lamps. Baku's inhabitants stayed behind the 14th century walls of their town



almost until the 19th century, when the Russian empire began exploiting in earnest the great oil reserves under the waters of the Caspian. An oil boom that lasted from 1880 to 1915 left a region of beaux arts mansions built by the newly-rich.

Baku is the beginning of the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline running from the Caspian oilfields through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea. Although very few travelers come here for the history and culture as opposed to the business of oil, the comfortable improvements to the city are a bonus.

Baku's **Old Town**, or Icheri Sheher,



was once the whole city, and is the best place to picture its history. It is completely encircled by the old city walls with their medieval gates. The winding streets and alleyways are home to private residences, mosques and *madrassahs*, carpet merchants and tiny shops. The aura of the past that permeates the town rewards exploration and careful investigation with surprising glimpses of a bygone era.

Overlooking the sea to one side and the Old Town to the other stands the **Maiden Tower**, the oldest component of Baku's UNESCO-listed district. Scientific and historical researchers have a difficult time firmly fixing the date of its construction, the reason for its existence or the function it once served. Stories and theories abound: that it once touched the sea, that it was a place of Zoroastrian sky burial, that a maiden chose an honorable death by plunging from its parapet to the sea, or that it was simply a part of Baku's defensive battlements. The 98-foot structure is a beacon to travelers today as it may once have been to sailors.

Continue with a visit to the **Tagiyev House Museum**. On the second floor of the National History Museum, some of the oil baron Tagiyev's opulent salons and halls have been preserved as examples of 19th century Baku's oil wealth. Tagiyev was a patron of the city, building schools, theaters and a ceramic pipeline to bring clean water from the mountains.

Located just outside the Old Town walls is Baku's **Fountain Square**. The square is a pedestrian plaza, a place to sit and relax, and a great vantage point from which to people-watch. Enjoy a snack or a drink at one of the many cafes, or circle the fountains and examine the surrounding pre-Soviet architecture.

The **Martyrs' Cemetery, or Martyrs' Lane**, set on a terraced hill above Baku's harbor, is a beautiful place formerly called Kirov Park, after one of Lenin's contemporaries. Today it pays homage to the 137 people killed during Black January 1990, when the Soviets sent tanks into the city and fired on Azerbaijani civilians. The attack marked the turning point in the country's drive toward independence. The memorial has expanded to honor the Azerbaijanis who lost their lives in the conflict with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The **Flame Towers** are the tallest skyscrapers in Baku, with a height of 190 m (620 ft). The facades of the three Flame Towers contain more than 10,000 high-powered LED lights displaying an illusion of fire that can be seen even from the farthest points in the city.

Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B – *Shah Palace Hotel or similar*



Day Three

Baku

Just forty miles from Baku lies an important site of ancient petroglyphs, **Gobustan**, added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2007. Quarry workers discovered the rock carvings here by accident in the 1930s. Since then, the carvings depicting men, women, animals and artifacts have been the focus of much study and speculation. Thor Heyerdahl famously proposed that the carvings of boats show that the Scandic people of Norway descended from the prehistoric residents of this area, though his theory hasn't been proven. The record left by these ancient people does attest to a far vaster Caspian Sea, and gives insight into details of daily life such as hunting and recreation, culture and economy. An excellent modern museum adds to the experience.

Originally constructed in the 13th century in honor of the sister of Imam Ali, the **Bibi-Heybat Mosque** was completely destroyed in 1934 as a result of Stalin's decrees. Local legend says that a white-robed woman was seen disappearing into the sea the day after the mosque's destruction. Reconstructed from plans and photographs, the new mosque was dedicated in 1998. Today it sits near one of Azerbaijan's first oil fields, which grew during the first oil boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The **Zoroastrian Fire Temple** in Surakhani village (nine miles from Baku) was originally built over a burning natural gas vent, although there is no real consensus about when this happened. As early as the 6th century, Zoroastrians lived on the peninsula, and may have worshipped here. The current temple was built in the late 1800s by Hindi-speaking Indians living in Baku. The complex comprises a walled pentagon enclosing an altar over the fire. Today the gas is piped to the altar, since the original pocket of natural gas has been exhausted, but the effect is still arresting.



Tour the interior of the **Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center**, the swooping architectural work that has become a landmark of modern Baku. Opened in 2012, the center was named after Azerbaijan's leader from 1969 to 1982 and from 1993 to 2003, and includes an innovative performing arts auditorium and spaces for major art exhibitions. The 619,000-square-foot building was designed by famed Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid, one of the most influential female architects of the 20th and 21st century and the award-winning master behind such buildings as the London Aquatics Center, the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the Guangzhou Opera House in China.

Finish for the day at the **Azerbaijani Carpet Museum**. The vivid colors and bold designs of Azeri, Caucasian, and Iranian carpets are on display in this modern building designed to resemble a rolled-up carpet. The extensive collection of carpets dates back as far as the 16th century. Learn how traditional Azerbaijani carpets are woven of naturally-dyed wool and cotton as weavers give demonstrations of traditional techniques. Regional differences and stylistic details are highlighted, revealing how handwoven carpets unite practical value, artistic merit, historical significance and beauty. In 2010 UNESCO added the traditional art of weaving Azerbaijani carpets to the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Meals: B – *Shah Palace Hotel or similar*



Day Four

Baku • Mazara • Shemakha • Lahij • Sheki

This morning, depart Baku and travel to Sheki, with brief touring stops along the way in Mazara, Shemakha and Lahij.

The first stop is near Mazara, to climb to the **Diri Baba Mausoleum**, set in the side of a hill. Constructed of stone blocks, the mausoleum is a two-story structure, where the second floor houses a mosque, decorated in carvings, that can be reached by a steep, winding stone staircase.

Continue to **Shemakha**, a renowned grape-growing and winemaking district that was once the major commercial center of western Azerbaijan. Present-day Shemakha is known for its finely wove carpets and built on the site of one of the oldest mosques in the Caucasus. Explore the town, passing by the recently completed **Juma Mosque**, or Friday Mosque, built on the site of one of the oldest mosques in the Caucasus.

Next stop is **Yeddi Gumbaz Mausoleum**, which means "Seven Domes." Although the domes may have originally numbered seven, today only three octagonal royal tombs remain, dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

While in Shemakha, **visit a local village farm** on the city's outskirts to learn how Azerbaijanis make their yogurt and butter. Leave town after lunch at a local restaurant.

Continue your exploration of western Azerbaijan with a visit to Lahij. **Lahij** is an ancient, almost untouched village that seems worlds away from Baku. Virtually isolated in its location surrounded by tall mountains layered with limestone, sandstone and clay, its inhabitants speak an ancient dialect of Persian known as Tat, as well as Farsi, Azeri and Russian. The village is known for its apple orchards and is home to coppersmiths and carpet weavers, trades which have been practiced here since the Middle Ages. Beautiful hand-tooled plates, goblets, trays and samovars are produced.

Visit the **studio of a copper master**, and learn about the UNESCO-listed traditions and techniques of casting and working with copper.

Continue to Sheki, arriving this evening and checking in to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B, L – *Sheki Saray Hotel or similar*





Day Five Sheki

Spend today exploring the historic city of **Sheki**, one of the oldest towns in Azerbaijan and believed to have been founded some 2,700 years ago.

Having chased out Persian rule, Sheki was an independent khanate until the 1820s when Russia added it to its empire. It is home to a well-preserved khan's palace with 500-year-old trees in its rose garden. The town is renowned for its

carpets and its special type of sweet halvah.

Embark on a **walking tour** of the town, exploring some of its small gems including the local crafts market, where old-fashioned manufacturing is alive and well. Drop by a local bakery to sample baklava or halvah.

Stop at the **caravanserai**, one of the remaining links to Sheki's rich past. Caravanserais were the inns of the Silk Road, and Sheki's caravanserai still accommodates travelers today. The courtyard of the old building once served as stables for camels and horses while their merchant owners slept in private rooms above them. This massive stone building was once one of five caravanserais in Sheki alone.

Following lunch, visit the **workshop of a local artist** who creates the vivid stained glass windows called *shebeke*, using a method that does not call for glue.

Take in the beauty of the mosaic-covered **Khan's Summer Palace** – added to UNESCO's Tentative List in 2001 – with its brilliant *shebeke* stained-glass work. Explore the fortress surrounding the palace, along with its history and crafts museums. Continue on to **Kish Village**, located on the bank of the Kish River. What you see today is all that remains of the original town of Sheki before the 18th-century mudslide that all but destroyed it.

Return to Sheki for overnight.
Meals: B, L – *Sheki Saray Hotel or similar*





Day Six

Sheki • Nij • Baku

After breakfast, head east and return to the capital for your final night in Azerbaijan. Along the way, enjoy an en route stop for touring in the small town of Nij.

Nij was part of a historic region known as Caucasian Albania, a once predominantly Christian territory with origins that can be traced as far back as the 5th century BC. The majority of people that settled in Nij belong to a small ethnic group called the Udis, direct descendants of ancient Caucasian Albanians who today have managed to retain their own unique

language and distinct form of Christianity. They are among the few practicing Christians living in Azerbaijan today, and enjoy sharing their history and traditions with inquisitive visitors.

The Orthodox Albanian Church of St. Elesei was restored to the Udi people of Nij Village in 2003. It had been given away to the Armenian patriarchy by Czar Nicholas I in the 19th century. The Udi people refused to go to the church and held services in their homes even through Soviet times. The Udi people, who mainly live in Azerbaijan, trace their origins back to the original Albanian Caucasian tribes, the most ancient peoples of the Caucasus.

Upon arrival in Baku, enjoy a free evening and independent dinner after checking in to your hotel.

Meals: B, L – *Shah Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Seven

Depart Baku

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

Meals: B



Private Journey Prices

Four-star hotels as listed in itinerary

2 traveler minimum, from \$2,795 per person, twin share

Single supplement from \$475

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement \$4,795

Hotel Upgrade Prices

With hotels upgraded where available

2 traveler minimum, from \$2,995 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$595

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement \$5,195

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and start day, and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Your Private Journey Includes

- Accommodations as noted in the itinerary.
All room types, even in upgraded properties, are standard entry-level doubles or twins, please call for room category upgrade pricing and information.
- 8 breakfasts and 3 lunches, per the itinerary. Other lunches and dinners are left independent to allow for exploration.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- One arrival and one departure airport transfer. (Additional arrival and departure transfers available at additional cost.) MIR will arrange for travelers to be met upon arrival and seen off on departure, whether we make your air arrangements or not.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private vehicle (size of vehicle depends on number of travelers in your group).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Baggage handling.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
- 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.

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Flexible Essential Private Trips are compact, well-designed, private tour itineraries – researched and ready to book on the dates you choose. They work perfectly as brief overviews of a country or as effortless extensions to group tours – great for solo travelers, couples, or private parties who prefer to travel independently but appreciate a savvy, pre-designed program.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are designed to be comfortable for travel in this part of the world, they will vary from small, moderate, three star to four star hotels, some quite small with basic amenities and services. It is important to keep in mind that the countries of the South Caucasus are not 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. Some areas, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be accessible and comfortable, it is an adventuresome tour. It is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved (there are a lot of steps – some steep – at many of the sites on this itinerary), the length of some car/van rides, and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases with tall, uneven steps. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day comfortably. 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.

If you are traveling through the South Caucasus countries and visit Armenia prior to Azerbaijan, be prepared for the possibility of additional questioning at passport control about your reasons for having visited Armenia. You should also expect that customs officials may wish to inspect any items you purchased in Armenia. Please note that it is prohibited to carry goods produced in Armenia bearing the name or label of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan; such items are subject to possible confiscation at the border. Alcohol produced in Armenia (especially with Nagorno-Karabakh on the label) and guidebooks, maps or other printed materials manufactured in Armenia (depicting Nagorno-Karabakh as Armenian territory or as an independent country) will not be allowed into the country of Azerbaijan.

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 the Caucasus, 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. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Azerbaijan here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/azerbaijan-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/>

Start Planning Next Year Now

2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 7 Days

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Please call if you're ready to book now.

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the day of your choice in 2021. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

Private Journey Prices – 2021

Four-star hotels as listed in itinerary

2 traveler minimum, from \$2,895 per person, twin share

Single supplement from \$575

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement \$4,895

Hotel Upgrade Prices

With hotels upgraded where available

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,095 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$645

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement \$5,295

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and start day, and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Weather

Azerbaijan experiences hot summers and cold winters, with late spring and early fall the best months to visit. The spring is abundant in wildflowers, while the fall brings spectacular colors as the leaves change. Rain is minimal. Late May brings temperatures ranging from 60-85 degrees Fahrenheit, and at the peak of mid-summer, temperatures can peak above 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the lowlands. Nighttime in both seasons brings cooler temperatures that generally drop to the 50s. September/October temperatures are slightly cooler, ranging during the day from 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit.

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 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 Turkish Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Azerbaijan.

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, US citizens only require one visa for this itinerary: Azeri. You may also need a visa for any country you fly through to join the tour (such as Russia or Turkey). MIR will apply for the Azeri e-visa on your behalf, but we will need you to send us a color scan of your passport issuing/signature page, and a color scan of a passport photo in order to start the process. **The cost of the Azerbaijan e-visa will be added to your tour invoice. The estimated cost is \$35 per person, visa fees are subject to change.**

Please be aware that at the time of this writing, Azeri visas can no longer be obtained on arrival at the airport in Baku.

With the use of electronic visas, it is no longer necessary to send away your physical passport before the start of your trip. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Pre- and Post- Tours

MIR can arrange for an extended program in the the neighboring countries of the Caucasus, the 'Stan countries of Central Asia, Western Russia or Eastern Europe. All of MIR's destinations are open to you, and all can be attached to this program. Please contact MIR for more details about exciting options for extended travel.

Also Nearby...

For more tours nearby, you may want to check out:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Georgia & Armenia, 13 days. These warm, green countries full of fruitful valleys and sawtoothed mountains are rich with unexpected treasures. Walk through river-cut canyons, explore magnificent cave towns, enter medieval fortress towers of stacked stone and visit the mountain homes of the Svan people.

Essential Georgia, 8 days. The tiny country of Georgia, hugging the shore of the Black Sea in the shadow of the Caucasus Mountains, has a long history of bountiful table traditions and winemaking. The



ancient land of the Colchis, where Jason sought the Golden Fleece, Georgia has lived in myth and legend for centuries.

Small Group Tours

A Taste of Georgia: Wine, Cuisine & Culture, 13 days. Explore gorgeous Georgia on a culinary and cultural caravan that traverses a country entwined with grapevines, overflowing with wine and abounding in hospitality. In the company of local MIR hosts – a winemaker and an ethnologist who are in love with Georgian food, wine and culture – experience the never-ending Georgian Feast like a local, dining and toasting in wine cellars, fine restaurants, vineyards and the homes of family chefs all over Georgia.

Treasures of the South Caucasus, 15 days. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan share stunning mountain backdrops, powerful stone architecture and a strong code of hospitality. Georgia's renowned winemaking traditions, Azerbaijan's Zoroastrian and Islamic background and Armenia's multitude of ancient churches combine to make this distinctive journey more than the sum of its parts.

Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan, 15 days. The center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to three of the most renowned of the Silk Road oases — Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Journey through these UNESCO Sites and the lush Fergana Valley, where Central Asia's silk production began with two cocoons hidden in the headdress of a royal Chinese bride.

Journey Through Central Asia: The Five 'Stans, 22 days. More than 2,000 years ago, the great trade routes that linked Europe and China opened Central Asia to foreign cultures, customs and religions. Join a modern-day caravan on an epic journey to five of these exotic countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The Pamir Highway: From the Tien Shan to the High Pamirs, 18 days. The Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan are some of the most rugged and beautiful on Earth, soaring upward where the Himalayas, the Tien Shan and the Hindu Kush meet. This adventurous journey over the Pamir Highway is a breathtaking route, in use since the time of the Silk Road.

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

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.) Airfares 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):

Flexible Essential 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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