



**Mongolia to Moscow:
A Trans-Siberian Railway Adventure
2016**



photo: Helge Pedersen



Mongolia to Moscow: A Trans-Siberian Railway Adventure

Landscapes and Cultures of Mongolia, Siberia and Western Russia

Two Departures in 2016 – Cultural Series – 16 Days

July 10-25 (with Naadam Festival) • September 4-19

Travel on regularly scheduled Trans-Siberian trains over a dramatic and variegated route that offers limitless opportunities to meet the diverse local people – Mongol, Buryat and Russian. Experience the rolling green hills and nomadic traditions of Mongolia, Siberia's UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal, the Europe-Asia divide at Ekaterinburg and endless taiga forest on your way to the booming capital, Moscow. The July departure features Mongolia's Naadam Festival.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Sunday	Arrive UlaanBaatar
Day 2, Monday	UlaanBaatar
Day 3, Tuesday	UlaanBaatar • Gorkhi-Terelj
Day 4, Wednesday	Gorkhi-Terelj • UlaanBaatar • overnight train to Naushki (Russian border)
Day 5, Thursday	Naushki • Hargana • Ulan Ude
Day 6, Friday	Ulan Ude • day trip to Old Believers village
Day 7, Saturday	Ulan Ude • day train to Irkutsk
Day 8, Sunday	Irkutsk
Day 9, Monday	Irkutsk • Old Railway by boat • Listvyanka
Day 10, Tuesday	Listvyanka • Irkutsk • depart on the Trans-Siberian Railway
Day 11, Wednesday	Aboard the Trans-Siberian
Day 12, Thursday	Aboard the Trans-Siberian • Ekaterinburg
Day 13, Friday	Ekaterinburg • depart on the Trans-Siberian Railway
Day 14, Saturday	Aboard the Trans-Siberian • Moscow
Day 15, Sunday	Moscow
Day 16, Monday	Depart Moscow



MIR Signature Features

- Admire the rolling steppe and monumental rock formations in alpine Gorkhi-Terelj National Park.
- Joke with local villagers over a plate of *posy*, while you toast to the four corners of the world in true Buryat fashion.
- Experience the sights and sounds of monastic life at the Ivolginsk Datsan, center of Buddhism in Russia.
- Discover the astounding beauty of Lake Baikal, a lake so vast the locals call it “the sea.”
- Delight in the intricate gingerbread patterning of traditional wooden houses in the small villages of Siberia.
- Visit the Church on the Blood, standing over the spot where Czar Nicholas II and his family were killed.
- Discover how “breaking bread” is a quintessential part of Russian train etiquette and the best way to make new friends.
- Conclude your incredible rail journey with a stroll through Moscow’s Red Square.

Tour Highlights

UlaanBaatar	Gandan Monastery, National Mongolian History Museum, Bogd Khaan Winter Palace, performance of traditional throat singing, Naadam Festival (<i>July departure only</i>)
Mandshir Monastery	Buddhist monastery and museum set in the Bogd Khaan Mountain Reserve, protected since the 13th century (<i>September departure only</i>)
Gorkhi-Terelj National Park	Beautiful alpine landscapes, overnight in a nomadic ger, optional horseback riding
Hargana	Buryat village on the Great Tea Way
Ulan Ude	Ivolginsk Datsan (Buddhist monastery), Russian Old Believers, or Trans-Baikal <i>Semeiskie</i> (UNESCO-listed “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”)
Irkutsk	Cathedral of the Epiphany, Gagarin Embankment, views of <i>Angara</i> ice-breaker, concert of chimes by master bell-ringer, Decembrist Museum, Private boat exploration of lakeside Circumbaikal Rail line, the most scenic stretch of the original Trans-Siberian Railway
Lake Baikal	Oldest and deepest lake in the world (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Listvyanka Village	Museum of Wooden Architecture, authentic <i>banya</i> , Baikal Limnological Museum
Trans-Siberian Railroad	World-famous rail line from UlaanBaatar to Moscow via Siberia
Ekaterinburg	Church on the Blood, Military History Museum, Europe-Asia Obelisk, Ganina Yama
Moscow	Moscow Kremlin and Red Square (UNESCO World Heritage site), Armory Museum, St. Basil’s Cathedral, Moscow Metro



Itinerary

Day One, Sunday Arrive UlaanBaatar

Arrive in UlaanBaatar and transfer to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: Independent – *UlaanBaatar Hotel, Ramada City Center, Bayangol Hotel, or similar*

Day Two, Monday UlaanBaatar

Begin touring today in **UlaanBaatar**, the political, industrial and cultural heart of Mongolia. Located in a basin 5,000 feet above sea level, UlaanBaatar is surrounded by the beautiful Khan Khentii mountains. Mongolians are traditionally nomadic people, and the concept of a settlement or city is fairly new. Ulaan-Baatar, or “Red Hero,” was established only 350 years ago, when the trade routes between St. Petersburg and Beijing made it an important trade and commercial center. At one time, over 90 percent of native Mongolians followed a nomadic lifestyle. Now, over 50 percent of the country’s population lives in UlaanBaatar.

Note: The programming will be different today for the two departures of this program, with the July departure spending about half of the day at Naadam festivities.

July program

Today is the opening day of Mongolia’s national festival, Naadam. The annual **Naadam Festival** is Mongolia’s favorite festival, showcasing the country’s best in wrestling, horse-racing and archery, as well as uniquely Mongolian sports such as “ankle-bone shooting.” It originated many centuries ago, but in the 20th century, this celebration of courage, strength, dexterity and marksmanship acquired new content and became more national in character. The festival now commemorates July 11th, the anniversary of Mongolia’s independence from China.



After breakfast at the hotel, head to the stadium to secure seats for the opening ceremonies. The procession begins at the central square and ends here, as the ceremony participants enter the stadium and take their places on the field. The opening ceremonies will take about an hour once the parade is complete.

This afternoon, fit in some city touring, including the **National Mongolian History Museum** and the **Gandan Monastery**. See September program notes below for information on these sites.



September program

Touring today includes an introduction to the city center and several of the key sights here. Begin with a visit to the **Gandantegchinlen (Gandan) Monastery**. Gandantegchinlen Monastery on Dalkha Hill was originally founded in 1838. Until then, most of Mongolia's monasteries had been small, mobile organizations that moved with the nomads. Meaning "Great Place of Complete Joy," the monastery was badly damaged during the 1930 Stalinist repressions, but the main temple was allowed to remain as a showcase for foreigners. Today, this temple houses a 20-ton gilded statue of "the Lord Who Looks in Every Direction," created in the 1990s to replace the one destroyed in 1937.

Continue with the **National Mongolian History Museum**. This museum provides a fascinating overview of the country's history and culture. The remodeled museum displays traditional implements of daily nomadic life, including Stone and Bronze Age artifacts, historical costumes of Mongolia's minority tribes, sacred relics and agricultural, fishing and hunting equipment.

After lunch, visit the **Bogd Khaan Palace Museum**. Mongolia's last Bogd Khaan, or "Living Buddha," lived for 20 years in this compound, built between 1893 and 1903. Unlike other old sites in UlaanBaatar, this one escaped destruction during the 1930s Stalinist purges. Six temples remain, as does a ceremonial gate built without the use of nails. On display are many of the gifts presented to the Bogd Khaan.

On both departures, get together this evening for a **welcome dinner**, with overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – *UlaanBaatar Hotel, Ramada City Center, Bayangol Hotel, or similar*

Day Three, Tuesday

UlaanBaatar • Gorkhi-Terelj



Note: The programming will be different today for the two departures of this program, with the July departure spending the morning at Naadam festivities.

July program

Continue celebrating Naadam this morning after breakfast at the hotel. Head to the outskirts of town where the horse-racing is held. Though the races are hard to see in their entirety, since they take place out on the open steppe, the people-watching among the crowds of spectators and locals is unmatched. Continue with the archery competitions before lunch at a local restaurant. Next, set off overland to **Gorkhi-Terelj**, as on the September departure.

September program

Head to the countryside today, leaving UlaanBaatar after breakfast and departing for Gorkhi-Terelj. Named after an alpine plant related to wild rosemary, **Gorkhi-Terelj National Park** abuts the 4,600-square-mile Khan Khentii Strictly Protected Area, where very few humans live. At over 5,000 feet, Gorkhi-Terelj is a sweeping alpine landscape of temperate grassland and small pines dotted with rustic



gers and grazing livestock. Horses are available for hire, and huge rock formations crop up at intervals through the rocky soil. This is the high steppe of Mongolia, and here the traveler can get a feel for the huge distances and enormous sky that nomads have contended with for eons.

While in Gorkhi-Terelj, spend a night in a ger or yurt, the traditional nomadic dwelling. The original design ensured an easily collapsible and transportable structure so nomadic people could follow their herds seeking new pastures. The walls of a ger are typically made of sections of birch or willow lattice formed into a circle and secured with leather straps. In the center of the ceiling is a hole which allows smoke to escape and fresh air and light to enter. The outside surface of the structure is usually covered in felt or canvas, tied in place by ropes made of hair and wool. The bottom of the covering is arranged so that it can be raised a foot off the ground in the summertime to allow better ventilation. Gers include wooden-framed beds and dressers and a wood-burning stove. Shower/toilet facilities are located in a separate building.

Meals: B, L, D – Terelj Temple ger camp or similar



Example ger only, decor and layout will vary.

photo: Ana Filonov

Day Four, Wednesday

Gorkhi-Terelj • Mandshir Monastery • UlaanBaatar • overnight train to Naushki



photo: Ana Filonov

On both programs, travelers return to the city today. The July departure will have some additional time at the ger camp to explore, and perhaps take an optional horseback ride, returning to the capital after lunch at the camp.

The September departure will have time for another visit in the countryside, **Mandshir Monastery**. Located in the Bogd Khaan Mountain Reserve – land that has been protected since the 13th century – the Mandshir Monastery, built in 1749, has been partially restored since its destruction in the 1930s. It was once a very large Buddhist center, housing over 300 monks and a medical school. Ruins of the original

temple, which was dedicated to Bodhisattva Manjushri, can still be seen. Visitors can walk from the monastery along trails through the nature reserve.

Both departures return to UlaanBaatar this evening in time for dinner at a local restaurant with a special **folk performance**, including **Mongolian throat-singing**, and a departure transfer to the train station.



Board the train for the overnight journey to Buryatia, Russia. From here on, the July and September programs are the same.

Meals: B, L, D – *Overnight sleeper train, four-berth compartments*



Day Five, Thursday Naushki • Hargana • Ulan Ude

Early this morning, the train arrives in **Sukhbaatar**, the Mongolian border town located at the confluence of the Selenga and Orhon Rivers. The border crossing is time consuming, with formalities on both sides. Expect a very early morning arrival on the Mongolian side of the border, and then a substantial wait while customs officials hand out paperwork, check documents and check through the train. After clearing the Mongolian side, the train rolls a bit further along, and the process is repeated with migration and customs paperwork for the Russian side. Disembark the train here in Naushki, the Russian border

town, and then begin the drive to Ulan Ude.

Stop at the native **Buryat village of Hargana**. Hargana is a lovely little Buryat village of nearly 1,000 souls on the open steppe about an hour's drive south of Ulan Ude. Locally famous for its flavorsome potatoes, the town is also of interest as the birthplace of the mother of the 12th Khambo ("Head") Lama of Russia, who died in 1927, and whose body is preserved at Ulan Ude's Ivolginsk Datsan. Visit the cheerful school with its gym and concert hall, and meet some of the teachers and students. Continue driving after lunch, with evening arrival at the hotel in Ulan Ude.

Meals: B, L (light snacks), D – *Hotel Geser or similar*

Day Six, Friday Ulan Ude

Following breakfast at the hotel, begin exploring **Ulan Ude**, the capital of the Buryat Republic. Formerly called Udinsk, Ulan Ude was founded in 1666 by Cossacks as a winter encampment on the Selenga River. The city later prospered as a major trading post along the Tea Route between China and Irkutsk. The indigenous people of the region, the Buryats, continuously resisted attempts to infiltrate their traditions and culture. Today, the unique cultural identity, language and religious beliefs of the Buryats make visiting Ulan Ude an enriching experience.

Tour the most interesting sites in and around Ulan Ude, including the **Ivolginsk Datsan**, the center of Russian Buddhism. The temple was rebuilt in 1946, after Stalin's severe restrictions on religious practice were loosened. Services were allowed, but no teaching was permitted, and a Soviet-style "Central Buddhist Board" was installed.

Today the *datsan*, or university, is a place of teaching again, and young lamas from all over Russia live and study here. The main temple, every square inch decorated with beautiful silks, precious stones and painted woodwork, is crowded every morning with chanting monks, townspeople and pilgrims. Prayer



wheels mark the perimeter of the compound, and small log cabins house the lamas and their families.

The *datsan's* library protects hundreds of silk-wrapped ancient scrolls and sacred *thangkhas*, large silk banners painted with deities or aspects of the Buddha. In the greenhouse grows a sapling purported to be from the *bhodi* tree under which the Buddha sat when he was enlightened.

Drive back to the city center for lunch at a local restaurant and further exploration of Buryatia's capital. Ulan Ude is also home to a covered market, original wooden houses in the merchant center of the city and the **world's largest statue of Lenin's head.**



After your city tour, head south out of town. Hear the stirring songs of the Old Believers in one of the villages founded in the Ulan Ude area around 1764. Rebelling against Patriarch Nikon's 1652 reforms of the Orthodox liturgy and ritual, the Old Believers fled or were exiled to Eastern Europe and then to Siberia. In their isolated Siberian villages, such as Tarbagatay, these groups were able to preserve their 17th century traditions, clothing, architecture, language and style of singing. In 2001, **UNESCO listed** the culture and unique choral music of the Trans-Baikal *Semeiskie* – as they are called in Siberia – as a “**Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.**” After dinner with the Old Believers, return to Ulan Ude for overnight at the hotel.

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

Day Seven, Saturday **Ulan Ude • day train to Irkutsk**

Board the day train this morning after breakfast at the hotel. Ride a small portion of the epic Trans-Siberian rail line, connecting Ulan Ude and Irkutsk, the two primary cities of Siberia. Arrival in Irkutsk will be late this afternoon,

Enjoy a brief walking tour on arrival, before check-in and dinner at the hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – *Empire Hotel, Victory Hotel or similar*



Day Eight, Sunday Irkutsk



Today is dedicated to an exploration of **Irkutsk, the “capital” of Siberia**. The city began as a wooden fortress founded by Cossacks in 1661. Fortified and armed to a greater degree than other Siberian settlements, Irkutsk became a staging area for trade convoys and exploring expeditions, and by the early 18th century, settlers had already built 13 churches.

The Irkutsk area has been a place of exile since Genghis Khan offered it to captives as an alternative to death. Czarist and Bolshevik political

exiles from the 18th through the 20th centuries ended up bringing culture and education to Irkutsk after their terms of slave labor ended. Under the Soviets, many thousands more were sentenced to gulags and ended their days in Irkutsk. Many of them worked to build the Trans-Siberian Railway, which passes through Irkutsk and has helped the city remain a commercial force.

The tour today includes a visit to a local market, the **Cathedral of the Epiphany**, the **Gagarin Embankment** and the World War II Memorial. Touring also includes views of the ice-breaker **Angara**. From 1900 to 1905 during the completion of the Circumbaikal Railway, the ice-breaker *Angara* was used to ferry passengers and cargo across Lake Baikal. The *Angara* was built in England, disassembled and shipped to Listvyanka, where a shipyard was built specially to put it back together. In 1918 it was refitted for passengers, and continued to be used until 1962 when it was retired. It is anchored in Irkutsk.

This evening climb to the bell tower of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and enjoy a **concert of chimes** by a master bell ringer. The master personally collected all the bells and reconstructed the tower. During Communist times, worship was discouraged and bells were collected, many of them being melted down for their metal.

Bell ringing came to Russia in the 10th century when the Kievan Rus' converted to Christianity. Although the Orthodox Christians of Byzantium hammered on narrow



photo: Helge Pedersen



wooden boards called *semantrons* during certain points in the liturgy, the Orthodox Rus joyfully took up bell ringing like the European Latinate Christians. Russian bell makers were quick to give the bells a distinctive Russian character, however. The Russian Orthodox hierarchy developed sets of special instructions, called *zvon*, which were rung for different occasions.

Unlike British “change-ringing,” in which intricate patterns are rung by ringers who each have control of one bell, the peals, or *zvon* of Russian Orthodox bells send messages, and can often be rung by one person.

This evening, return to the city center for an independent dinner and overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B, L – *Empire Hotel, Victory Hotel or similar*

Day Nine, Monday

Irkutsk • Old Railway by boat • Listvyanka Village



Following breakfast, depart Irkutsk for Listvyanka Village on the shores of Lake Baikal. Here board a **private boat** for a cruise along the **old Circumbaikal Railway**. The five-hour round-trip journey includes an onboard lunch of Baikal *omul*, as well as a walk along the tracks and inspection of some of the tunnels along the way. The Circumbaikal is the **original line used by the Trans-Siberian Railway** before the present-day route was completed, and it’s one of the most complicated rail systems in the world. The route hugs the rocky lake shore and passes through 33 tunnels along its length.

After the all day boat excursion, return to the small fish-

ing village of **Listvyanka**. After time for an independent dinner, enjoy an optional authentic Russian *banya*, or steam bath.

Meals: B, L – *Baikalskie Terema or similar*

Day Ten, Tuesday

Listvyanka Village • Irkutsk • depart aboard the Trans-Siberian

After breakfast today, begin a scenic tour of Listvyanka. Start with the **Baikal Limnological Museum**. (Limnology is the study of the life and other phenomena in fresh water, particularly lakes and ponds.)



Learn about the origin of the lake, its characteristics as the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world and its species, including some that are found nowhere else, like the *golomyanka*, a transparent fish, the *omul*, a tasty salmon-like fish, and the freshwater seal, the *nerpa*. Several of the Baikal silver-grey freshwater seals entertain visitors here.

Nerpa are some of the only freshwater seals in the world, and their appearance in the middle of Siberia is still somewhat of a mystery. DNA analysis of their blood shows that they are related to the Arctic fur seal, but some differences have been noted. The Baikal *nerpa* have two more liters of blood than the Arctic seal, allowing them to remain underwater for almost 70 minutes. Scientists here have observed them diving for fish at 900 feet.

Visit the **Museum of Wooden Architecture**. This outdoor museum is a 166-acre collection of authentic Russian and native Buryat, Evenki and Tafalar houses and community buildings from the 17th to the early 20th centuries. The wooden structures were moved here from various Siberian locations and reassembled into little hamlets and nomadic camps that demonstrate how people actually lived.

After **lunch with a local family**, head back to Irkutsk to tour and enjoy a classical music concert in the restored house of Prince Sergei Volkonsky, now the **House Museum of the Decembrists**. The Decembrists were a group of young officers who had served abroad during the War of 1812 and become advocates of democratic reform. In December 1825, they, along with some 3,000 followers, refused to swear allegiance to the new czar, Nicholas I. Their rebellion was quickly put down, and five of the leaders hanged. The rest were sentenced to forced labor in Siberia. Many of them, with their wives, settled in Irkutsk after their terms were over, and brought with them education and culture.

Transfer to the train station to board the train to Ekaterinburg. Set out along Russia's most important artery, the **Trans-Siberian Railway**. The legendary train route rolls past remote towns with charming painted houses. Frequent stops in cities and villages are short, but provide priceless opportunities for photos and souvenirs. Dinner tonight is on the train.
Meals: B, L, D –Aboard Trans-Siberian Railway, four-berth compartments



Day Eleven, Wednesday Aboard the Trans-Siberian

Spend almost two full days on the Trans-Siberian, **riding the rails** to Ekaterinburg. Make a cup of tea or coffee from the samovar at the end of the car, talk to other Russian or foreign travelers aboard, or just watch the landscape scroll by the window. Rail travel is among the most popular forms of travel in Russia, and you will get the chance to meet other travelers on their way to the capital.



Your tour manager is on hand to help you make the most of the journey, from striking up conversations with locals, to assisting you with ordering lunch in the dining car, to coordinating platform timings so you can stretch your legs at stops.

Meals: B, D on train –Aboard Trans-Siberian Railway, four-berth compartments

Day Twelve, Thursday

Aboard the Trans-Siberian • Ekaterinburg

Arrive in Ekaterinburg early in the evening in time for dinner at a local restaurant in the hotel. The rest of the night is free to relax and unwind after completing the first leg of your Trans-Siberian journey.

Meals: B, D – Park Inn Hotel or similar

Day Thirteen, Friday

Ekaterinburg • depart on the Trans-Siberian

Spend a full day exploring **Ekaterinburg** today before boarding an overnight train to Moscow. Ekaterinburg, founded in 1721 and named after Catherine I, is best known as the place where the last czar, Nicholas II, and his family were imprisoned and executed by the Bolsheviks. Today, the Church on the Blood stands over the spot where Czar Nicholas II and his family were killed in 1918.

The city, formerly known as Sverdlovsk, is markedly different from other Siberian towns due to its rich mining industry, developed before the revolution. Sverdlovsk was closed to foreigners until 1990 because of its

many defense plants. This is where U.S. pilot Gary Powers was shot down in his U2 spy plane in 1960. Ekaterinburg is also known as the birthplace of Boris Yeltsin. Born to peasant parents, Yeltsin studied civil engineering at Ekaterinburg Technical University before working his way up the ladder in the Communist Party.

Today's tour of Ekaterinburg begins at the **Plotinka Dam**, which harnessed the water in the Iset River for the town's ironworks. The dam has been reconstructed twice, and now holds back the water in the City Pond at the heart of the city. **Historical Square** surrounds the pond, and on its edges are most of Ekaterinburg's museums.



photo: Helge Pedersen



Ekaterinburg's **Military History Museum** covers the Second World War and the Soviet Military during the Cold War. A tiny piece of U.S. pilot Gary Powers' U2 spy plane is on display here. Powers, who bailed out, was exchanged for a Soviet spy in 1962.



The **Black Tulip** is a moving new monument. This statue of an exhausted and traumatized soldier is a memorial to the young men sent to fight in Afghanistan in the last years of Soviet power. Here in the square, with its bubbling fountains, is a corresponding memorial to the people who died and were injured in the war with Chechnya.

Continue on to the **Church on the Blood**, standing over the spot where Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed in July of 1918. The young family has been canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church, and declared martyrs as holy passion-bearers, reverent believers who were

tormented by the Soviets for their beliefs. The church was designed in the early 20th century Russian/Byzantine style that Nicholas favored, and completed in 2003.

After lunch at a local restaurant, head westward out of town to cross continents at the **Europe-Asia Obelisk**. Traditionally the border between Europe and Asia, the Urals stretch 1,250 miles south from the Antarctic. They are not particularly high; indeed the highest point, Mount Narodnaya, is only 6,214 feet, but they contain vast mineral deposits of iron ore, bauxite, gold, copper, zinc, coal and, in the south, oil, all of which support the large industrial centers of Ekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk. The Europe-Asia monument includes an obelisk and a stone marking the point where Europe ends and Asia begins, just before Ekaterinburg along the eastbound Trans-Siberian rail line.

A little over six miles north of Ekaterinburg is the mineshaft where the bodies of the last czar and his family were hidden after their execution. The place is called **Ganina Yama**, and today there is a monastery here. On the grounds of the new monastery, named the Holy Monastery of the Royal Martyrs Czar Nicholas and Family, are six wooden churches made without the use of nails, in the old-fashioned Russian way, to honor Nicholas and his family.



In the late afternoon, transfer to the Ekaterinburg rail station



for the overnight train to Moscow.
Meals: B, L, D – Aboard Trans-Siberian Railway, four-berth compartments

Day Fourteen, Saturday

Aboard the Trans-Siberian • Arrive Moscow

Breakfast and lunch will be arranged on the train today. You will arrive in Moscow in the evening. After checking in at the hotel, enjoy dinner in a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – Park Inn Sadu or similar

Day Fifteen, Sunday

Moscow

Take today to explore Russia's dynamic capital, **Moscow**, on foot and by metro. The first **Moscow Metro station** opened in 1935; today, there are more than 150 of them along the 125 miles of track. The stations in the city center are showpieces of Socialist art, furnished with statues, frescoes and mosaics, and decorated with marbled, gilded, and bronzed walls and ceilings.

Founded in 1147 by Yuri Dolgoruky (literally “Yuri of the Long Arms”), Moscow rose to prominence during Mongol domination and eventually became the Russian capital. While eclipsed for a time by St. Petersburg, Moscow was restored as the Russian political center after the October Revolution in 1917, and celebrated its 850th anniversary in 1997.

Explore **UNESCO-listed Red Square, with St. Basil's Cathedral** and the Kremlin grounds. The **Moscow Kremlin** reminds modern-day Russia of its medieval past. Built on the site of Prince Yuri's hunting lodge, the imposing Kremlin overlooks the Moskva and Neglina rivers.

In the mid-14th century, the Russian princes ruling from the Kremlin became so powerful that Moscow was named the center of the Russian Orthodox Church. Under the guidance of Ivan the Great, Moscow extended its influence and soon became the seat of Russian political power as well.

Today, the Kremlin is once again the center of Russian politics and power. Inside the fortress walls are numerous palaces, cathedrals, government buildings and the **Armory Museum**. Built in the 16th century as a warehouse for the Kremlin's weaponry, the building became an exhibition hall and museum in 1814. The Armory Museum now houses Russia's national treasures such as icons, Fabergé eggs, a bejeweled chalice belonging to Prince Yuri and Catherine the Great's ball gowns and shoes.



photo: Helge Pedersen





Lunch is independent, after which the afternoon is left free. Your guide can make suggestions for shopping or strolling, or you may want to pack and relax. This evening, toast your journey with a **farewell dinner** at a local restaurant.

Meals: B, D – *Park Inn Sadu or similar*

Day Sixteen, Monday

Depart Moscow

Following breakfast, the tour concludes with transfers to the airport.

Meals: B

Special Note

The July departure of this tour is timed to coincide with the Naadam Festival in UlaanBaatar. The touring days in and around UlaanBaatar will be affected, as a lot of time will be dedicated to experiencing the festival. Attending a festival is an exciting way to see a country or city at its best, but please note schedules and itineraries are *highly likely to change* around the Naadam celebrations. Though we make every effort to adhere to the planned itinerary, the increased number of travelers and large crowds require a larger than normal dose of flexibility and adaptability.

Dates for 2016 – Two Departures – Cultural Series

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note you need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to the tour start date due to airline flight schedules. *Note: The programming will be different on Day 2 and Day 3 for the two departures of this program.*

July 10-25, 2016 (includes Mongolia's Naadam Festival)

September 4-19, 2016

Package Prices

4-16 travelers \$6,995 per person, twin share

Partial single supplement \$895*

*A partial single supplement is available for this tour. Single rooms are available in the standard hotels, but may not be available in gers, and are **not available on the overnight trains**. We do our best to provide a single room in the gers.*



Train Upgrade Pricing

Note: The package includes one berth per traveler in a four-berth coupe for train overnights. Each traveler will be sharing with three other travelers, possibly of mixed sexes, as is the standard on trains in this region, for the nights on board trains.

Upgrade from one berth per traveler in a four-berth compartment to two berths per traveler in a four-berth compartment on the overnight trains UlaanBaatar-Naushki, Irkutsk-Ekaterinburg and Ekaterinburg-Moscow: \$625 per person, twin share (4 nights).

Please note that we cannot guarantee single accommodation on the overnight trains, even for solo passengers who have paid for the above train upgrade and the partial single supplement. Solo travelers upgrading to two-travelers-per-cabin accommodations may be matched with a roommate of the opposite sex.

Land Tour Includes

- Shared accommodations in superior tourist class hotels, guesthouses and gers (yurt accommodations that sleep two).
- Overnight sleeper train accommodations from UlaanBaatar to Naushki, Irkutsk to Ekaterinburg, and Ekaterinburg to Moscow, in second-class rail compartments. One berth per traveler in four-berth train compartments is included in the program cost. Each traveler *will share the compartment* with three other travelers possibly of mixed sexes, as is the standard on trains in this region. **See notes above for train upgrade pricing.**
- 15 breakfasts, 11 lunches and 12 dinners. Some meals are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- Services of an experienced, English-speaking MIR Tour Manager with local guides at specific sites.
- Arrival/departure 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.
- Transportation by van/jeep throughout Mongolia, by coach/van throughout Russia, by seated day trains between Ulan Ude and Irkutsk, and by private boat along the Old Railway route. Note: size of vehicle used for overland drives depends on final group size.
- Baggage handling where available.
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, optional insurance information, visa kit.
- *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.
- Naadam entrance fees – **July departure only.**

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes – available through MIR; please call for rates.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Partial single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.



- Visa fees.
- Train upgrades.
- 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.

Cultural Series

MIR's Cultural 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. All trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

This Cultural Series program, by nature, is designed to be adventurous, but also comfortable for rustic travel in this region. Accommodations vary from three star hotels to simple and basic accommodations in lodges and ger camps. One night is spent in a ger camp in Mongolia (with shared shower and WC facilities). Four nights total are spent on overnight trains (four-berth compartments) with shared WC but no bath facilities. The train configuration will be one berth per traveler in four-berth train compartments on overnight sleeper trains between UlaanBaatar and Naushki, Irkutsk and Ekaterinburg, and between Ekaterinburg and Moscow. Each traveler will share the compartment with three other travelers. Compartments may be mixed sex. As noted above, single compartments are not available, even for travelers who pay the partial single supplement and the train compartment upgrade charge. Solo travelers upgrading to two travelers per cabin accommodations may be matched with a roommate of the opposite sex.

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 of public restrooms. You are traveling in some areas which see relatively few travelers, and where the infrastructure is not yet fully developed. Air-conditioning is a luxury and rarely available in facilities outside the capitals.

While this program is designed to be comfortable for travel in this region, it is rated as **rigorous touring** due to several factors. In Mongolia, the highway infrastructure is severely limited outside of UlaanBaatar; excursions outside the city both to Gorkhi-Terelj and to the Naadam horse-racing (**July departure only**) will involve driving over rough, dusty and unpaved roads in basic vans, Russian jeeps, or other vehicles. Seating at the Naadam stadium in UlaanBaatar (**July departure only**) is on hard, unbacked benches, and a significant amount of time (three or more hours) will be spent there. The sun can be intense in the stadium as well. Naadam time also brings out large crowds and pickpockets, so it is important to be extra vigilant of your personal items at that time.

This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot, both in urban and rural settings. In all cities, you're likely to encounter uneven surfaces and attractions accessible only via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators. In the rural areas, there will be a variety of challenging terrains. Mongolian terrain is often rocky, with loose rocks and scrub growth; Siberian terrain can be muddy or slick with rain, and is occasionally rocky in the Baikal area. Trains have steep steps to enter and exit, and narrow hallways with multiple heavy doors once on board. Boats may have steep, uneven and slippery gangplanks, with or without handrails. Four-berth compartments used for train overnights have two upper berths which require a climb up a narrow ladder/fothold. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least two to three miles a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibil-



ity, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.

Every effort has been made to make the information in this schedule accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We do our best to inform participants in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Mongolia and Russia, this may not always be possible. This tour maintains a focus on cultural interaction, and we will be visiting private homes and sharing meals with local residents. It is therefore important that tour members have a desire to involve themselves in the local culture in order to enjoy this trip.

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

Weather

Mongolia, Siberia and the Trans-Siberian train routes can be traveled at any time of year. UlaanBaatar experiences hot summers and cold winters. July high temperatures average around 71 degrees Fahrenheit but can peak in the 90s. Lows in UlaanBaatar in July should be in the low 50s. Siberia and Ekaterinburg in July are warm to hot as well, with lows in the 50s and highs that can range from the 70s up to the 90s. Moscow temperatures range about the same.

In September, highs in UlaanBaatar should be around 60 degrees Fahrenheit with lows possibly dipping into the upper 30s. September highs in Irkutsk, Ekaterinburg, and Moscow both should run near the upper 50s, though lows in Siberia will be lower than those in Moscow. Expect low temperatures around 40 degrees Fahrenheit in Siberia and September lows in the mid 40s for Moscow. Keep in mind, the weather at any time of year in these areas is rather unpredictable. Rain is not likely, but definitely possible.

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 Korean Air, Air China and Turkish Airlines into Ulaan Baatar; and Lufthansa, Swiss Air and Aeroflot from Moscow, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to the region.

Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 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

One visa is required for U.S. passport holders on this tour: single-entry Russian. Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to obtain this visa. **Non-U.S. passport holders will likely require a Mongolian visa** in addition to the Russian. Please call for details. MIR will provide you with the necessary applications and instructions.



An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$290. 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.

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for a pre-tour extension in China for those wanting to travel the width of Asia, from Beijing to Moscow. At the conclusion of the tour, we can arrange for a post-tour extension in St. Petersburg, the Baltics or Europe. MIR can coordinate travel arrangements such as hotels, train reservations and many other services.

Also Nearby...

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

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Tibet, 8 days. The highlights of this stirring journey are the holy city of Lhasa and the remote monasteries and sacred refuges hidden in the heart of the forbidding Tibetan Plateau.

Essential Siberia, 7 days. Near the shores of UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal, survey the Mongolian, Cossack, Buryat and Buddhist heritage of southern Siberia, and admire its overwhelming natural beauty.

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

Essential Poland, 6 days. On this focused tour, visit four Polish UNESCO sites in six days – Warsaw's Old Town, Krakow's Historic Center, the Auschwitz/Birkenau camp and the Wieliczka Salt Mine.

Essential Balkans, 12 days. Visit seven Balkan countries in 12 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

A Chronicle of Russian Cuisine & Culture, 10 days. This delectable new journey, led by a passionate local foodie, lets you eat your way through Russia's greatest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, while taking care to touch on all the definitive cultural sites. You will learn that Russian cuisine goes far beyond



borscht and *blini*. Meet famed chefs for hands-on cooking classes, and dine in a smorgasbord of restaurants, family homes and a country *dacha*, where home-cooked cuisine and traditional Russian culture come together.

Mongolian Explorer: The Gobi and Beyond, 14 days. Mongolia: The name conjures up images of vast grasslands, windswept steppe and endless sky. Here, an empire built on horseback galloped across two continents, leaving behind the names Genghis and Kublai Khan. Follow their lead, using the horsepower of modern vehicles to cover the incredible distances at the heart of Mongolia. End in the capital, where the skills of that nomadic army are preserved at the extraordinary Naadam Festival.

Siberian Winter Escapade, 8 days. When you think of Siberia, you may think of punishment and exile, of barren tundra and vast expanses of nothingness – of a place of no return. The closely guarded truth is that Siberia is a wild and wooded place of unimaginable beauty, especially in winter. UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal freezes so hard that you can walk on water, race teams of sled dogs and fish through the ice. Experience the rare opportunity to sweep across the frozen lake by hovercraft to sacred Olkhon Island.

Siberian Odyssey: Legends of Lake Baikal & Tuva, 13 days. Explore South Siberia, a remote and atmospheric land where mounted Scythians thundered across the steppe long ago. Meet the Buryats of UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal and the Tuvan and Khakass people, whose Mongolian neighbors imbued them with Buddhism, shamanism and *khoomei*, or throat-singing.

Siberia & Mongolia: Spirits and Nomads (with Country Naadam), 16 days. Beautiful and exotic, Siberia and Mongolia are worlds away from the traditional beaten path. Explore the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, then fly to the red sands of the Gobi Desert. Celebrate a local Naadam Festival, far from the glitz and ruckus of the capital. In Siberia, take to the waters of great Lake Baikal, the oldest and deepest lake on earth, and ride a section of the fabled Trans-Siberian Railway.

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 on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2016 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).

MIR Small Group Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:



61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$500;
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 (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), the Balkans (Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Central Asia (the five 'Stans), Iran, the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Mongolia, China, Tibet, the DPRK (North Korea) and Central/East Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania).

Celebrating Our 30th Season in 2016

A travel company doesn't last 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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