



**Siberian Odyssey: Legends of Tuva
& Lake Baikal
2020**



Siberian Odyssey: Legends of Lake Baikal & Tuva From Olkhon Island to the Valley of the Czars

2020- Explorer Series - 13 Days

July 26-August 7

Explore South Siberia, a remote and atmospheric land where mounted Scythians thundered across the steppe long ago, leaving behind grave mounds and golden ornaments. On this cross-cultural adventure, interact with many different peoples: Russians, Tuvans, Buryats, and Khakass, learning about their cultures through stories and celebrating their traditions with song. Begin in Irkutsk, founded by Cossacks in 1661. Visit the shores of deep, UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal, and explore its largest island, Olkhon, the place where the area's indigenous Buryat people believed that the gods of Baikal once lived. From Irkutsk, fly to Kyzyl, Tuva's remote capital. The heart of the journey is a stay in Tuva, a rarely visited rural region just north of the Mongolian border. Dine here with local people, and learn about the art of throat-singing. Journey through the Valley of the Czars to Abakan, capital of Khakassia, before ending in cosmopolitan Moscow.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Sunday, July 26	Arrive Irkutsk, Russia
Day 2, Monday, July 27	Irkutsk • Listvyanka
Day 3, Tuesday, July 28	Listvyanka • Olkhon Island
Day 4, Wednesday, July 29	Olkhon Island
Day 5, Thursday, July 30	Olkhon Island • Irkutsk
Day 6, Friday, July 31	Irkutsk • fly to Kyzyl
Day 7, Saturday, August 1	Kyzyl
Day 8, Sunday, August 2	Kyzyl • day trip to Samagaltai
Day 9, Monday, August 3	Kyzyl • Turan • Shushenskoye
Day 10, Tuesday, August 4	Shushenskoye • Abakan
Day 11, Wednesday, August 5	Abakan
Day 12, Thursday, August 6	Abakan • fly to Moscow
Day 13, Friday, August 7	Depart Moscow



MIR Signature Experiences

- Quench the heat of an authentic Russian *banya* with a dip in Lake Baikal.
- Visit sacred Olkhon Island, exploring the northernmost cape, Khoboi, whose name means “tusk” or “fang.”
- Experience a traditional shaman ceremony in remote Tuva, based on an animistic spiritual belief that used to be an integral part of Tuvan life.
- Hear the otherworldly sounds of Tuvan throat-singing at a traditional performance.
- Visit the home of a nomadic family in the remote Tuvan countryside, observing the art of making Tuvan cheese, and experiencing the rural hospitality and lifestyle of today’s Tuvan nomads.
- Make a stop in the little village of Shushenskoye, Lenin’s home in exile during the late 19th century.
- Discover the Valley of the Czars, where the remnants of ancient Scythian burial mounds, called *kurgans*, were unearthed.
- Conclude your epic journey with dinner and a special performance of Khakassian folk music.

Tour Highlights

Irkutsk	Cathedral of the Epiphany, Church of Our Savior, Alexander III monument, WWII Memorial, Decembrist House Museum, neighborhood of old wooden houses
Listvyanka	Museum of Wooden Architecture, Baikal Museum
Lake Baikal	Oldest and deepest lake on earth (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Olkhon Island	Khuzhir Village, shaman ceremony, Pribaikalsky National Park, Shaman Cape, Olkhon Nature and History Museum, Shaman Rock
Kyzyl	Geographic Center of Asia, Tuvan cowboy statue, shaman ceremony, National Museum of Tuva, Seven Beavers sacred site, performance of Tuvan throat-singing, Kyzyl Expo (market)
Samagaltai	Former capital of Tuva, visit with a local nomadic family
Turan	Valley of the Czars and Scythian Tombs, Museum of Russian Colonists, meal in a private home, Arzhan II archaeological site
Shushenskoye	State Ethnographic Museum, site of Lenin’s pre-revolutionary exile
Abakan	Khakassia’s capital, Khakassia Local Studies Museum, folk performance, Scythian grave mounds dating from 5th century BC, Great Salbyk Mound
Moscow	St. Basil’s Cathedral, Red Square (UNESCO World Heritage Site), GUM, Christ the Savior Cathedral, Novodevichy Convent (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Metro stations



Daily Itinerary



Day One, Sunday, July 26

Arrive Irkutsk, Russia

Arrive in Irkutsk today; most arrivals will be early a.m. on the overnight flight from Moscow. Transfer from the airport to the hotel to check-in and rest up a bit before beginning with your introduction to this Siberian gem.

The **city tour** includes a visit to the **Cathedral of the Epiphany, Church of Our Savior**, the **Alexander III monument** and the **WWII Memorial**. Additionally, visit the area of **old wooden houses**, many with the intricate

fretwork surrounding brightly painted window frames typical of local Siberian architecture.

Enjoy a festive **welcome dinner**.

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

Day Two, Monday, July 27

Irkutsk • Listvyanka

After breakfast this morning, transfer to **Listvyanka** on the shores of Lake Baikal, where life remains much the same as in centuries past. This little lakeside town began as a fishing outpost, and has become a center for the study of Lake Baikal. Located near the outlet of the Angara River, the town is included in Pribaikalsky National Park.

Touring begins with 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 century. The wooden structures were moved here from various Siberian locations and reassembled into little hamlets and nomadic camps that demonstrate how people actually lived. The gate to a 17th century fort, a working chapel built in 1679, and a potter's workshop give you a feel for the people who spent their lives here.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before visiting the **Baikal Museum**, with its focus on limnology, the study of the life and features of inland waters, particularly lakes and ponds. Learn about the origin of the lake, its characteristics as the oldest and deepest lake in the world and its species, including some that are found nowhere else, such as the *golomyanka*, a transparent fish, the *omul*, a tasty salmon-like fish, and the *nerpa*, Baikal's freshwater seal. An aquarium at the museum is home to a pair of these seals.



Check into the hotel and and overnight here. If time permits, take some free time this evening to stroll the shores of the lake or chose to indulge in an optional authentic *banya*.
Meals: B, L – *Krestovaya Pad* or similar

Day Three, Tuesday, July 28

Listvyanka • Olkhon Island

This morning, depart overland to the Olkhon ferry terminal, and from there cross the narrow strait to **Olkhon Island**. Called the “Sacred Sea” by the indigenous people who have lived along its shores, **UNESCO-listed Lake Baikal** is the most ancient lake in the world. Formed in a rift in the earth’s surface nearly 25 million years ago, the lake basin today holds about 20 percent of the world’s unfrozen fresh water. Its great age and isolation have produced one of the richest and most unusual ecosystems on earth.

Olkhon Island, in the middle of Lake Baikal, is long and narrow like the lake. The steep hills along its east coast plunge into the deepest part of the deepest lake in the world. The island has been a sacred place for millennia, the place where the indigenous Buryats believed that the gods of Baikal lived. **Shaman Cape** – just off the sandy west coast near the island’s largest town, Khuzhir – has been used for many years by shamans, and later Buddhists, for ceremonies.



The island is in a peculiar rain shadow, and has more sunny days than the Black Sea coast. The northern half is covered in pine, fir, and larch, and the southern half is hilly steppe and sand dunes. The transparent Baikal waves breaking on the sandy shores of Olkhon’s western side and the rocky crags in the east combine to make it a national treasure. The island and its flora and fauna have been protected as a part of Pribaikalsky National Park since 1986.

On landing, transfer to **Khuzhir Village**, the largest settlement on Olkhon, with about 1,500 people. It is located in the center of the island on the western side. Khuzhir has some shops, cafés, and a local Sunday market, as well as a museum.

Dinner and overnight will be at a lodge located at the center of the village.
Meals: B, L, D – *Olkhon Lodge* or similar

Day Four, Wednesday, July 29

Olkhon Island

Explore this remote island after breakfast at the lodge. Start with a **shaman ceremony** at Olkhon’s best known spot, **Shaman Rock**. Near the village of Khuzhir is Burkhan Cape, a horseshoe-shaped cove with the sacred rock at its tip. The gods of Baikal are said to have lived here, and both Buddhists and shamanists have acknowledged its power.





Next, head to the north end of the island and **Khoboi Cape**. Khoboi is the northernmost cape on Olkhon, a sharp and narrow outcropping that gave it the name, meaning “tusk” or “fang.” If the weather is clear, you can see all the way north to the Ushkaniye Islands and the Holy Nose peninsula; sometimes even *nerpa*, Baikal’s freshwater seals, can be seen. On the left is Maloye More, the Lesser Sea, and on the right is Bolshoye More, the Greater Sea and the deepest part of Baikal.

After lunch, continue touring through the Olkhon Island portion of **Pribaikalsky National Park**. Over 70 percent of the park is forested, and five rivers flow through the park into Lake Baikal. This is an area of great beauty and diversity, and is set

aside not only to preserve the many unique species of plants and animals here, but to allow visitors to enjoy the park as well.

Return to the village by way of the western shore. Visit the **Olkhon Nature and History Museum**, founded by the island’s former school principal about 40 years ago. Its displays include costumes and household items used by island people in years past.

Dinner and overnight will be at the lodge.
Meals: B, L, D – *Olkhon Lodge or similar*

Day Five, Thursday, July 30 Olkhon Island • Irkutsk

This morning after breakfast, depart to the ferry terminal for the short ride back across the strait. From here, drive to **Irkutsk**. Enjoy lunch in a local restaurant en route, arriving in Irkutsk in the afternoon.

Irkutsk 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. 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 brought 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 these exiles worked to build the Trans-Siberian Railway, which passes through Irkutsk and has helped the city remain a commercial force. Upon arrival into Irkutsk, check into the centrally located hotel for dinner and overnight.

Time permitting, visit the **Decembrist House Museum**. The Decembrists were a group of young officers who had served abroad during the War of 1812 and become advocates of political reform. In December 1825, they, along with some 3,000 followers, refused to swear allegiance to the new czar, Nicholas I. Their uprising 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. The House Museum of the Decembrists is in the former home of Sergei Volkonsky and his wife, Maria.

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

Day Six, Friday, July 31

Irkutsk • fly to Kyzyl, Tuva

Depart Irkutsk today, transferring to the airport for the flight to **Kyzyl, Tuva**. Kyzyl is the capital of the Republic of Tuva, an autonomous region of the Russian Federation. Tuva's history dates back to the Paleolithic Era. From the 6th to the 8th century, the Tuva region was part of the Turkic Khanate. During the Middle Ages, portions of the Silk Road crossed through Tuva, and from the 8th to the 18th century, the territory was part of the Mongolian Empire. In 1757, Tuva came under Chinese rule, which lasted until 1911 when Russia gave the region "nominal independence." It was during the Chinese period that Tibetan Buddhism first came to Tuva.

In 1921, the Bolsheviks established the Tuvan People's Republic, or Tannu-Tuva, but Moscow interfered with its autonomy almost immediately. Over the course of the next several years, Tuva was stripped of its independence and incorporated into the Soviet Union. In 1944, Tuva was officially annexed by the USSR and declared an autonomous region. Under Soviet rule, nomadic peoples were forced to collectivize and religious practices were discouraged, if not banned. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tuva became a member of the Russian Federation and elected its first president the following year. A revival of Buddhism and semi-nomadic practices is currently taking place.

Today, the population of Tuva is over 310,000 people, two-thirds of them Tuvan and the remainder Russian. Tuvans were historically semi-nomadic, and share a cultural heritage with their southern neighbors, the Mongols. Many still tend herds of yaks, goats, sheep, cows, and reindeer, and live in yurts during the summer months as the animals migrate toward summer pastures. The Tuvan language is Turkic, not Mongolian, and their ancestral religions are Tibetan Buddhism and shamanism.

The days spent in Tuva are the centerpiece of the journey. Here at the geographic center of Asia, meet locals, venture to small villages, and listen to throat-singing concerts.

Upon arrival at the Kyzyl airport, check into the hotel and enjoy lunch before a brief afternoon tour of Kyzyl and the surrounding area. The city tour includes a visit to the monument marking the **Geographic Center of Asia** and the bronze statue of the **Tuvan cowboy** on top of the hill overlooking the city.

Dinner tonight will be at the hotel restaurant.

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

Special Note: As this is an area where the tourism infrastructure is not at all developed, a sense of time and urgency is not evident. An extra measure of patience and flexibility concerning schedule changes is required to enjoy this region.

Day Seven, Saturday, August 1

Kyzyl

After breakfast at the hotel, visit a Buddhist temple and if time permits, **meet with a local monk** for a conversation. Take time to see a **soapstone carver in his studio** as well, and learn about this ancient art passed down through generations.





After an independent lunch, meet an expert beadmaker who will give you a **presentation on local jewelry-making**, and pay a visit to Kundustug, or “**Seven Beavers,**” a mineral spring long regarded as a sacred site. Visit a yurt camp and take a walk in the fresh air. Back in town, browse the **Kyzyl Expo**, where concession stands sell all kinds of produce and local products. Return to the hotel this evening with some time to rest before dinner in a local restaurant.

Schedules permitting, this evening enjoy a performance of **Tuvan throat-singing**. Throat-singing is practiced in both Tuva and Mongolia. This unique musical technique is more than an exotic novelty; it is part of a rich tradition.

It is believed that throat-singing evolved from human efforts to duplicate natural sounds such as a breeze blowing across the steppe or a rushing river. In throat-singing, a single vocalist produces two, and sometimes three distinct tones, or overtones, simultaneously. There are several styles of throat-singing, including *sygyt*, the brightest style in which the highest register of the voice is used; *khoomei*, which is a softer style with the tones slightly muffled; and the *kargyraa* style, which produces a very low, growling sound. In many cases, the singer is accompanied on a horsehead fiddle.

In everyday life, throat-singers are herders taking a rest and amusing themselves. The singing can be heard from afar, and the singer may be sending greetings to his people who are living in a yurt far from the pasture.

Finally, meet with a shaman for a demonstration of an **authentic ceremony**. Tuvan shamanism is based on an animistic spiritual belief that used to be an integral part of Tuvan life and, to some extent, still is. Shamans intercede for people with the spirit world, the unseen world that pervades the Tuvan’s environment. Shamanism was deliberately suppressed by the Soviets, and Tuvans who discovered they had shamanic abilities were forced to hide them from anyone except close relatives. Since 1991, shamanism in Tuva has experienced a resurgence.

Meals: B, D – *Odugen Hotel or similar*

Day Eight, Sunday, August 2

Kyzyl • day trip to Samagaltai

After breakfast at the hotel this morning, visit the **National Museum of Tuva**. The museum was founded in 1929, and contains artifacts explaining the Tuvan peoples’ history and culture. Scythian discoveries from the *kurgan* of the Valley of the Czars in Turan, originally sent to the Hermitage, have been returned and are found here as well.





After lunch in a local café, drive to **Samagaltai**, former capital of Tuva. The drive is about three hours through the remote Tuvan countryside. Stop to **visit a nomadic family**, and take some time to learn about their unique way of life. Observe the art of making Tuvan cheese, and perhaps get a private throat-singing lesson.

Dinner tonight will be at the hotel in Kyzyl.

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

Day Nine, Monday, August 3

Kyzyl • Turan • Shushenskoye

Following breakfast, set off for Shushenskoye, stopping en route to visit **Turan**, located in a region known locally as the **Valley of the Czars** because of the number and richness of the **Scythian burial mounds** located here. The Scythians were nomads and mounted warriors who dominated the Eurasian steppes from Central Asia to southern Russia and Germany, disappearing in the early years of Christianity. During the tour, visit some of these excavated *kurgans*, which are burial mounds covering wooden burial chambers.

The Scythian culture was one of the earliest and most successful equestrian cultures. The remains of many highly prized horses have been found in the excavated graves in the Valley of the Czars, some of them still in their ceremonial bridles. Important personages had their horses sacrificed and buried near them to bear them into the afterlife.

A 2001 expedition found 44 pounds of Scythian gold near Turan in a 7th century BC *kurgan* called Arzhan II. The 5,700 pieces were beautifully designed and executed ornaments for clothing, shields, quivers, and equestrian armor. Inspect the **Arzhan II archaeological site** where this major discovery was unearthed.

While in Turan, visit the **Museum of Russian Colonists** to learn about the first Russians who moved into this area. Continue to the village of Tanzibei for a **traditional home-cooked meal**. This obscure town south of Krasnoyarsk on the Yenesei River is remembered mainly because **Lenin was exiled here** for publishing illegal revolutionary literature. Over 2,000 miles away from St. Petersburg, where he was arrested, Lenin spent his time writing more illegal revolutionary literature and living with his wife and fellow revolutionary, Nadezhda Krupskaya, who followed him out from the capital. In the 1970s, in honor of Lenin's 100th birthday, the entire village was rebuilt, recreating conditions as they were when he lived here, from 1897 to 1900.

Upon arrival in Shushenskoye, check into the hotel for overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – *New Village Hotel or similar*



Day Ten, Tuesday, August 4

Shushenskoye • Abakan

Breakfast is at the hotel with some touring here in Shushenskoye before departure to Abakan.

Visit the **State Ethnographic Museum**. This complex recreates a traditional Siberian village of the 19th century. After the visit in Shushenskoye, continue the drive to Abakan via Minusinsk. A city of about 70,000, Minusinsk was founded in 1739 at the convergence of the Yenesei and the Minusa rivers. A regional agricultural and trade center, Minusinsk is famous for its wonderful heirloom tomatoes, whose seeds have been passed down through many generations. Next is lunch at a local café before heading down the road to Abakan.



Abakan is Khakassia's capital. Khakassia is a small republic within the Russian Federation, located in southwest Siberia. Encompassing the valleys of the Abakan and Yenesei Rivers and the mountains surrounding them, Khakassia has been inhabited since the Stone Age. There are thousands of ancient archaeological sites here, including **Scythian grave mounds dating from the 5th century BC**. Turkic-speaking tribes, now called the Yenesei Kyrgyz, established the Khakassian state here in the 8th century AD. The Mongol invasions of the 13th to 15th centuries destroyed much of their culture, and many Khakassians migrated south to what is now Kyrgyzstan.

The Russians founded a fort at Abakan in the early 18th century. Today a town of about 200,000, Abakan is the most important city in a region rich in natural resources and natural beauty. Local marble is used in many of the buildings here, and the **Khakassia Local Studies Museum** displays a forest of limestone burial totems, one of which is 3,000 years old. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before overnighting at the hotel.

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



Day Eleven, Wednesday, August 5

Abakan

Enjoy an independent morning today before heading out after lunch to explore the **Great Salbyk Mound**. About 37 miles north of Abakan, the Great Salbyk Mound emerges from the steppe in a vaguely pyramidal shape. A remnant of the burial *kurgans* of the Bronze Age Tagar culture, the mound sits among 56 scattered mounds, some of them fenced with stone plaques. Excavated in the 1950s, the Great Salbyk Mound today is nearly 100 feet tall.

Back in Abakan, enjoy a **folk performance of Khakassian music**. Toast your Siberian adventure at a

farewell dinner, and get some rest before your early flight to Moscow tomorrow.

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



Day Twelve, Thursday, August 6
Abakan • fly to Moscow

Take an early transfer to the airport this morning for the flight back to Moscow. On arrival, transfer to the city center for some light touring and lunch, including **Red Square**, the **Cathedral of Christ the Savior**, and **GUM**.

Continue with a visit to the grounds of **UNESCO-listed Novodevichy Convent**. In some circles, the cemetery at Novodevichy is as famous as the convent itself. The fancifully decorated graves belong to some of the most renowned Russians of the last 150 years, including not only artists and musicians, but political leaders such as Khrushchev and Yeltsin, aircraft designers such as Tupolev and Ilyushin, several cosmonauts, the Soviet Union's foremost anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, a female sniper named Lyudmila Pavlichenko, and Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, who allegedly shot herself after an argument with Stalin.



The rest of the afternoon is free to rest or pick up any last-minute souvenirs. An optional **Metro Tour** is available for those who want to further explore Moscow's underground stations, sometimes referred to as "Underground Palaces." The first **Moscow Metro** station opened in 1935, and today there are over 200 of them along the 210 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.

Dinner tonight is independent to allow time to pack and prepare for departure tomorrow.
Meals: B, L – *Park Inn Sadu Hotel or similar*

Day Thirteen, Friday, August 7
Depart Moscow

Following breakfast, the tour concludes with a transfer to the airport.
Meals: B

In 2020 – One Departure – Explorer Series

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

July 26-August 7, 2020



Package Prices – 2020 Pricing Information

4-12 travelers, \$6,895 per person, twin share
Plus internal air \$600 (economy class, subject to change)
Single supplement \$825

Tour Includes

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

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

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1-877-709-5596.



Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021- One Departure – Explorer Series

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

July 25-August 6, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

4-12 passengers, \$6,995 per person, double occupancy
Plus internal air \$650 (economy class, subject to change)
Single supplement \$850 per person.

Explorer Series

Explorer Series tours, with a maximum of 12 travelers, are the perfect match for those seeking a more active adventure. These interactive cross-cultural journeys are more limited in size and more spacious in depth and focus. We use a variety of accommodations ranging from small private hotels to bed and breakfasts to rustic lodges and homestays, and trips may feature hiking or kayaking opportunities.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

This Explorer Series program, by nature, is designed to be adventurous, but also as comfortable as possible for rustic travel in this region. Accommodations will vary from three star hotels to simple and basic accommodation in lodges.

We are traveling in some areas which, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed – particularly in Tuva. While we believe this program is designed to be comfortable for travel in this region, this is an adventurous tour. It is rated as **rigorous** touring due to the daily walking involved (with some hiking), the length of some bus/jeep rides over rough terrain and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least two miles a day including some hills and stairs, keeping up with fellow travelers; and carry their own baggage when necessary. Travel in remote Siberia often involves driving over rough, dusty and unpaved roads in basic vans or off-road vehicles.

It is important to keep in mind that Siberia is not up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, rough road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, availability and quality of public restrooms, and variety of locally available foods. If you rely on electricity for CPAP, or for any other reason, you must have your own battery or other back-up, or please reconsider participation. Tuva is a wild land, and tourists rarely venture here.

Some streets are of packed dirt, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases with tall uneven steps. Museums generally do not have elevators. Vehicles, hotels and restaurants are rarely



air-conditioned. Please note that for the Lake Baikal program we travel by boat, and travelers should expect steep and potentially slick gangways, the possibility of rough water, doorways with raised thresholds and steep stairwells within the boats. Although portage is provided where possible, you may have to carry your baggage for short distances.

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 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. Only those willing to accept these conditions should consider joining this program. Flexibility, a sense of humor, the ability to walk two to three miles a day (including some hills, stairs and light hiking) and manage your own baggage at all times are essential components to the enjoyment of your trip. If you are looking for a less adventurous experience, MIR offers other scheduled private train tour options featuring more comfortable accommodation and less rigorous touring. Please ask for details on these tours (**TransSiberian Express**) as well as a custom private journey which may be a better match for your interests and physical capabilities.

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 Russia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/russia-travel-advisory.html>

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

Weather

The most enjoyable time to visit Siberia is in the summer when temperatures are more or less reliable throughout the region and Lake Baikal is at its very best. Our route does not take you into any extreme weather areas; however, the weather at any time of year here is rather unpredictable. Rain is not likely, but definitely possible. July and August temperatures are typically 55-77 degrees Fahrenheit. There is a strong likelihood of windy and cooler weather around Lake Baikal, as well as at night.

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, Swiss Air and Aeroflot, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Russia.

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

At the time of writing, U.S. passport holders require one visa for this tour: Russian. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour.

An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$312. 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. At the time of writing, the Russian Embassy is offering U.S. passport-holders three-year multiple-entry visas at the same price as single- or double-entry visas (the \$312 estimated above). Travelers who need to expedite their processing may not have the same option of getting the multi-entry visa at the single-entry visa cost. Please call for information.

Standard visa processing in the Russian visa section is ten to fifteen days for this tour. Travelers should prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel extensively in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing, depending on your plans. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

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

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

Pre and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for an extended program in Moscow, St. Petersburg, the Baltics, or elsewhere before or after the tour, or in any of our destinations (many have direct connections from Moscow) after the end of the program. Please call us for suggestions.

Also Nearby...

For other options in Russia and Mongolia you may want to check out the following:

Flexible Essential Series – Classic Private Journeys

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 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.

Small Group Tours

Mongolia to Moscow: A Trans-Siberian Railway Adventure, 17 days. 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 and endless *taiga* forest on your way to the booming capital, Moscow. The first departure of this program features the Naadam Festival in UlaanBaatar.

Siberia & Mongolia: Spirits and Nomads, 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.

Remote Russia: Yakutia & Kamchatka, 14 days. Explore the remote corners of Russia, including the wild Kamchatka Peninsula, uneasily perched on the Pacific Ring of Fire, and Yakutia, a challenging northern frontier known for mammoths and diamonds. Visit the steaming Valley of the Geysers in Kamchatka, as well as the Kingdom of Permafrost in Yakutsk.

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).

Scheduled MIR Small Group Tours
Cost of cancellation, if received:



61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;
31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;
30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

References

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

Why MIR?

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

Destination Specialization

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



30 Years of Experience



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

Recommended & Respected

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


More Questions?

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

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