

**TRAIN : Golden Eagle Trans Siberian Express**

JOURNEY : The Classic Journey - Westbound (Vladivostok to Moscow)

Journey Duration : Upto 15 Days

### **DAY 1 VLADIVOSTOK**

Arrive at Vladivostok Airport, where you are met and transferred to the five-star Lotte Hotel Vladivostok.

This evening you are invited to our Welcome Dinner. Specially selected international wines are included with dinner, as with all meals during the tour.

### **DAY 2 VLADIVOSTOK**

Vladivostok is a military port located on the western shores of the Sea of Japan and is home to the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet. Due to its military importance, the city was closed to foreigners between 1930 and 1992. Vladivostok (literally translated as 'Ruler of the East') offers visitors an interesting opportunity to explore its principal military attractions including a visit to a preserved World War Two submarine. Our city tour will also take us to the iconic suspension bridge over Golden Horn Bay, one of the largest of its kind worldwide, which opened in 2012 for the APEC conference.

Following a champagne reception at Vladivostok Railway Station, and with a military band playing on the platform, we will board the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express. After settling into our modern, stylish cabins we enjoy dinner in the restaurant car as our rail adventure westwards begins.

### **DAY 3 KHABAROVSK**

Situated 15 miles (25 kilometres) from the border with China, Khabarovsk stretches along the banks of the Amur River. Khabarovsk was founded as a military post in 1858, but the region had been populated by several indigenous peoples of the Far East for many centuries. It is now a busy city with tree-lined streets.

Located next to the station we will pass the monument to Yerofey Pavlovich Khabarov, the Far East explorer the city is named after, and see the impressive World War Two memorial to the fallen soldiers. We will also have time at the Regional Museum where the local history has been well-preserved with a rich collection of artefacts describing the cultural and natural history of the region

#### **DAY 4 ON BOARD**

Our journey today follows the Shilka and Amur rivers, close to the Chinese border. Enjoy Russia at its most beautiful and remote, as the landscape unfolds outside your window. Or you may like to attend one of the absorbing lectures or Russian language lessons.

#### **DAY 5 ON BOARD**

Today offers the perfect opportunity to practice your improving Russian or watch a DVD as you watch the world pass by. For those who like to socialise, the Bar Lounge Car is the perfect place to enjoy a chat with your fellow passengers as you listen to our resident musician.

#### **DAY 6 ULAAN BAATAR**

Our Trans-Siberian adventure takes us into Mongolia and a visit to its capital, Ulaan Baatar. Mongolia, once the very centre of an enormous empire led by Genghis Khan, is a country rich in culture and history with beautiful landscapes and nomadic people. Mongolia is famous for its endless green Steppes, grazing livestock and white, nomadic Gers (Yurts) dotted all across the countryside.

We start the tour at Gandan Monastery, one of Mongolia's most important Buddhist Monasteries housing a community of over 500 monks. The full name, Gandantegchinlen, translates as 'the great place of complete joy'. At Chinggis Square (formerly Sukhbaatar Square) we can see the central monument to Genghis Khan, undoubtedly the most feared and revered Mongol. We then drive out of the city to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park and enjoy the beautiful scenery of wild Mongolia, having the opportunity to visit a traditional Ger and meet a nomadic family or try our hand at horse-riding, an intrinsic part of Mongolian life.

Alternatively, there is an option to stay in the city as part of our Freedom of Choice touring. After Gandan Monastery and Chinggis Square we visit the National Museum where we learn about the country's intriguing history. We will also see Bogd Khan Winter Palace Museum, the winter residences of Bogd Khan, the last Mongolian emperor, built between 1893 and 1903.

We can also explore the city and have some free time for shopping for Mongolian souvenirs and their specialty cashmere. We will also enjoy a performance of traditional Mongolian throat singing and contortionists.

Please note, depending on final timings provided by the railway authorities we may substitute the railway journey from Russia into Ulaan Baatar with a private jet charter from Irkutsk or Ulan Ude so that we can maintain the advertised programme for Mongolia. This will be advised in your final documentation.

### **DAY 7 ULAN UDE**

The ethnic and cultural diversity of Ulan Ude, the capital of the Buryat Republic, offers a unique insight into its heritage. As we tour the area you will notice the different faces of these welcoming Buryat people. During our exploration of the Old Believers' Village we have the opportunity to learn about the culture and history of these religious people as we are treated to a concert featuring local traditions and folk singing.

### **DAY 8 LAKE BAIKAL**

Few natural sights can surpass the beauty and grandeur of Lake Baikal, a major highlight on our Trans-Siberian journey. Lake Baikal is the deepest lake in the world and holds 20 per cent of the world's freshwater. Also known as the 'Pearl of Siberia', it is home to a unique breed of freshwater seal and over 50 species of fish including omul. For five hours we wind our way through tunnels along cliff hugging tracks above the lake. With a vista of snow-capped peaks along the far shore forming a picture-perfect backdrop, we gain a full appreciation of the engineering achievement which produced this part of the railway in the early twentieth century. To add to the grandeur of the day our Golden Eagle train will be hauled by a Soviet Era steam locomotive on this beautiful section of line. There will be plenty of opportunities to take photographs as the train winds its way along the lake.

This will be an unforgettable part of your journey.

Weather permitting, we stop in an extremely picturesque location by the lake for photographic opportunities. For the brave hearted there is time for a refreshing swim in the crystal clear and ice-cold waters of Baikal. Travelling onwards to the end of the Baikal branch line, we leave the train and travel by boat on the lake to Listvyanka, a small Baikal settlement nestling at the base of the surrounding hills and visit the Lake Baikal Museum and Aquarium where you can learn about the flora and fauna of the lake.

We will enjoy a delicious barbecue prepared by our own chefs, including freshly smoked omul fish, in the delightful covered dining area on the shore of Lake Baikal to complete a memorable day.

As part of our Freedom of Choice excursion programme you can choose a hiking opportunity up Chersky Mount or you can choose to take the chair lift, which offers some spectacular and panoramic hillside views of the grandeur of the lake below.

### **DAY 9 IRKUTSK**

Our visit to Irkutsk, the 'Paris of Siberia', takes in the most significant sites and museums in this fascinating city, including an exploration of the classic wooden architecture with its intricately carved lace-like decorations that has given many of this region's buildings such a distinctive and unique appearance. We also visit the Volkonsky House Museum, which is dedicated to the memory of the aristocrats who were exiled to this remote outpost after the failed Decembrists uprising of 1825. We recreate the atmosphere of that time with a champagne reception and private concert.

You could learn to cook some traditional Russian dishes with a local chef and prepare your own lunch with our Freedom of Choice option. Or you might also wish to visit a traditional Russian Dacha (summer house) to get an insight into the everyday life of an average Russian family.

Please note: Freedom of Choice touring options may be subject to variations dependent on finalised train timings and local weather conditions.

### **DAY 10 ON BOARD**

A day to unwind and reflect on the many sights and sounds we have experienced on the journey so far. Chat to your fellow passengers, perhaps learn a few more words of Russian or simply enjoy the ever changing landscape outside your window.

### **DAY 11 NOVOSIBIRSK**

A modern 'Soviet' city, we experience the life and character of Novosibirsk's rich culture where the arts and science predominate. The city is located in the heart of Russia and is situated on both banks of the River Ob. Our city tour takes us to Lenin Square where the imposing Opera House is located. An architectural marvel, it houses two permanent ballet and opera companies and is one of the largest opera houses in the world. In front of the Opera House, we visit an impressive statue of Lenin – a marvellous opportunity to have your photograph taken with this iconic political leader.

Time permitting, south of the city we will visit Novosibirsk's excellent Railway Museum. The museum displays locomotives and rolling stock from the late 1800s, including carriages of the Tsars, through to the Soviet era. Alternatively, as part of our Freedom of Choice programme choose to visit the Mineralogical Centre with its fine display of Siberian minerals.

## **DAY 12 YEKATERINBURG**

Founded in 1723 by Peter the Great, Yekaterinburg is the capital of the Urals. Known as the Great Divide, the Ural Mountains create the natural border between Europe and Asia so that the cultural and architectural influences of European and Asian civilisations come together in this fascinating and cosmopolitan landscape. Our city tour takes us to the poignant site where the Romanov, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, was executed with his family by the Bolsheviks in 1918 following 78 days of imprisonment. Now a church dedicated to their memory, this site provides us with a powerful insight into the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. We will also drive to the obelisk marking the geographical border and we can drink a glass of champagne with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia.

Time permitting, our Freedom of Choice programme features either a visit to the recently opened Museum of Military Machinery. The museum houses an amazing collection of different types of military hardware including tanks, aircraft, boats and even armoured trains. The museum is a real treat for anyone with an interest in the Soviet past, unparalleled by anything else along the route. Alternatively, we will make a short stop at the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre, recently opened in Yekaterinburg, which is dedicated to the contemporary political history of Russia and its first president.

## **DAY 13 KAZAN**

Situated on the River Volga, the picturesque and historic city of Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan. Here we have the opportunity to see for ourselves its rich tapestry of history and culture. One of the highlights of this city tour is our exploration of the Kremlin Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Within the walls of this ancient citadel we will explore the stunning mosque and picture-perfect onion-domed cathedral.

As Kazan is the birthplace of one of Russia's most famous opera singers, Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938), we honour his memory with a private concert of his music. You will also have time to wander through the main pedestrian area of Kazan and immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the city.

## **DAY 14 MOSCOW**

Our touring programme of Russia's capital takes us to the grandeur of the Kremlin – the spiritual, historical and political heart of Moscow – and to see the treasures of the Tsars in the Armoury Chamber where we will enjoy an exclusive private viewing.

Our exploration of the city continues with a visit to Red Square, the iconic symbol of Russia's former military and political might with its eclectic mix of fascinating architecture. Here we visit the ornate St Basil's Cathedral's magnificent onion-domed spires and marvel at the beautiful façade of the world-famous GUM department store which was constructed in Tsarist times.

Lunch is served in Café Pushkin, a legendary Moscow restaurant serving traditional Russian cuisine with a décor that revives the atmosphere of an early 19th century mansion. An essential part of any visit to Moscow is a tour of the opulent and unique stations of the Moscow metro - showpieces of Socialist art furnished with statues, frescoes and mosaics, unsurpassed anywhere in the world.

If you have been to Moscow before we offer an included Freedom of Choice touring programme where we show you other sights of Moscow such as the famous State Tretyakov Gallery (National Museum of Fine Art) or the Space Museum.

Included in our time spent in Moscow is one night at the stylish five-star Four Seasons Hotel Moscow. Located in the historic building of Moskva Hotel and occupying one of the most enviable addresses in the very heart of Moscow, the hotel is a short walk from the Kremlin, Red Square and the Bolshoi Theatre

## **DAY 15 MOSCOW**

Following breakfast, spend the remaining time in Moscow at your leisure, followed by your transfer which will take you to the airport to begin the return flight home.