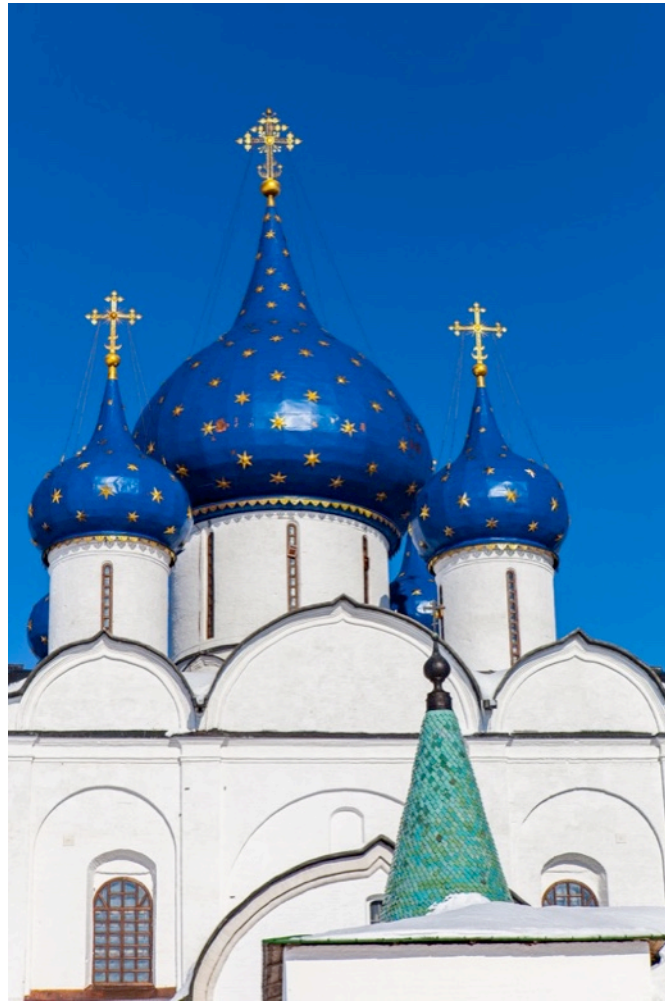




MIR
C O R P O R A T I O N

30
years



**Russia's Imperial Capitals &
Ancient Villages
2017**



photo: Renee Van Drent

Russia's Imperial Capitals & Ancient Villages

Moscow, the Golden Ring and St. Petersburg

Three Departures in 2017 – Cultural Series – 11 days

May 26-June 5 • July 7-17 • September 1-11

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. This exploration begins in Moscow, the political and business center of the country. Head out into the countryside and circle the historic Golden Ring, celebrated for graceful old churches, famous frescoes and traditional craftsmanship. Enjoy Russian hospitality with several opportunities to dine with Russian families in private homes. The journey culminates in three full days in St. Petersburg, the cultural capital of Russia and home to the world-renowned Hermitage Museum. Take in five UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the way.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Friday	Arrive Moscow, Russia
Day 2, Saturday	Moscow
Day 3, Sunday	Moscow • Vladimir • Suzdal
Day 4, Monday	Suzdal • Plyos • Kostroma
Day 5, Tuesday	Kostroma • Yaroslavl
Day 6, Wednesday	Yaroslavl • Rostov • Sergiev Posad
Day 7, Thursday	Sergiev Posad • Fedoskino • Moscow • train to St. Petersburg
Day 8, Friday	St. Petersburg • Peterhof • Pushkin
Day 9, Saturday	St. Petersburg
Day 10, Sunday	St. Petersburg
Day 11, Monday	Depart St. Petersburg



MIR Signature Experiences

- Visit Red Square and the Kremlin, heart of Russia.
- Walk in the footsteps of the Romanovs and Ivan the Terrible as you trace Russian history in the towns and villages of the Golden Ring.
- Tour a Sergiev Posad workshop where nesting *matrioshka* dolls are painted by hand.
- Appreciate Russian artistic traditions with a visit to a center of authentic lacquer miniature painting in Fedoskino.
- Enjoy the heritage of the Russian arts as you attend an opera or ballet at one of St. Petersburg's prestigious theaters.
- Admire the vast collection of art housed in the world-renowned Hermitage Museum.
- Experience a warmhearted welcome at meals in the homes of local families.

Tour Highlights

Moscow	Sparrow Hill, Moscow University, Novodevichy Convent (UNESCO World Heritage Site), GUM, Red Square and the Kremlin (UNESCO World Heritage Site), St. Basil's Cathedral, Armory Museum
Vladimir	Kremlin, Golden Gates, Cathedral of the Assumption and Cathedral of St. Demetrius (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Bogolubovo	Church of the Intercession on the Nerl (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Suzdal	Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life, kremlin, Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral (UNESCO World Heritage site), Archbishop's Chambers, dinner in a private home, Savior Monastery of St. Euphinius
Plyos	Russian <i>izba</i> , lunch in a private home
Kostroma	Catherine the Great's favorite city, St. Ipaty Monastery, Trinity Cathedral
Yaroslavl	Spassky (Savior) Monastery, Church of the Epiphany, Church of St. Elijah the Prophet, historic town center (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Rostov	Kremlin
Sergiev Posad	UNESCO World Heritage Site, Trinity St. Sergiev Lavra, <i>matrioshka</i> factory
Fedoskino	Museum of Fedoskino Lacquer Miniatures
St. Petersburg	Hydrofoil on the Gulf of Finland, historic city center (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Piskarev Memorial Cemetery, Peter and Paul Fortress, Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, wooden house of Peter the Great, Usupoff Palace, St. Isaac's Cathedral, Nevsky Prospekt, Hermitage Museum, Church of the Savior on the Blood, dinner in a private home
Peterhof	Peter the Great's estate with gravity-fed fountains and extensive gardens, Monplaisir Palace
Pushkin	Catherine's Palace with the Amber Room



Daily Itinerary

Day One, Friday Arrive Moscow, Russia

After arrival in Moscow, transfer to the centrally located hotel. The remainder of the afternoon is yours to relax or explore the neighborhood around the hotel. This evening meet fellow travelers and enjoy a **welcome dinner** at a local restaurant.

Following dinner, those interested can take an optional **walking tour of Red Square at night**.

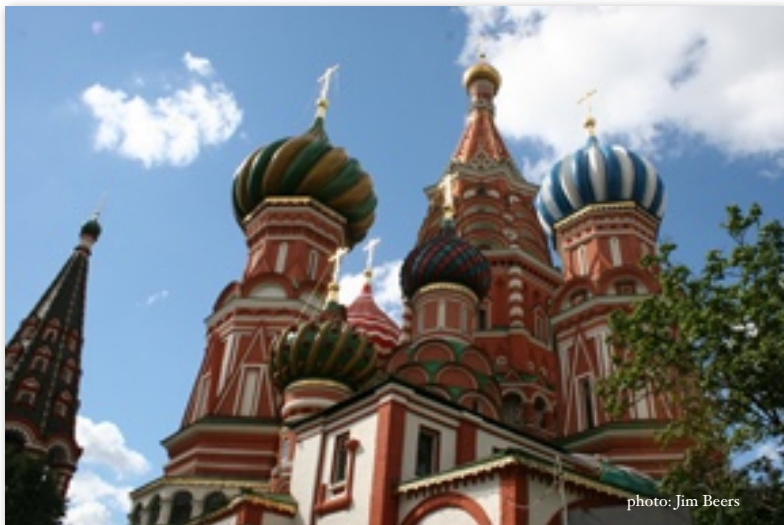
Meals: D – *Hotel Aquamarine or similar*

Day Two, Saturday Moscow

Following breakfast depart on a city tour of Moscow, the economic and political center of Russia. 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. Eclipsed by St. Petersburg for 200 years, Moscow was restored as a political center after the October Revolution in 1917 and served as the capital of the Soviet Union until 1991. Moscow today is a booming metropolis, dignified yet dynamic, where ancient churches sit shoulder to shoulder with 21st century financial institutions, and where the new high-rise commercial district of Moscow-City is changing the face of the city forever.

Touring begins this morning with an introductory drive through the city, taking in the panoramic views of Moscow from **Sparrow Hill** and **Moscow University**.

Continue on to **GUM**. The eastern side of Red Square is dominated by the elaborate façade of GUM, the former State Department Store, a glass-topped 1890s arcade of booths. Galleries lined with trendy shops overlook three naturally lit halls. Originally a marketplace sheltering over a thousand merchants, the building was nationalized after the revolution and used for many years as a staging area for the enormous parades on Red Square. Later it became the only shopping mall in Moscow, selling shoddy state-manufactured goods. Today many of the shops are exclusive boutiques offering high-end imports.



Next, visit the **Novodevichy Convent**, founded in 1524 by Grand Prince Vasily III to honor the return of Smolensk to Russia from the Lithuanians. Novodevichy is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. The main attraction of the convent is its **cemetery**. Such luminaries as Gogol, Chekhov, Scriabin, Mayakovsky, Prokofiev, Eisenstein, Khrushchev, Raisa Gorbachev and Boris Yelstin are buried here, and some of the graves are quite fanciful.

After an independent lunch, stop for a closer exploration of **UNESCO-listed**



Red Square, the Kremlin, and the Armory Museum. Red Square and St. Basil's Cathedral are perhaps the most recognizable symbols of Russia. The square owes its origins to Ivan III, who in the late 15th century had all buildings removed from the eastern wall of the Kremlin. For the next 400 years, this newly formed area was a trading center. In 1920 all traders were banned from the square, and in the early 1960s cars were banned as well, making Red Square a pedestrian area.

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

Take in the iconic views of **St. Basil's Cathedral**. The cathedral was built to celebrate Ivan the Terrible's victory at the Tatar stronghold of Kazan in 1552. Built between 1555 and 1561, it was originally painted white. The domes were not patterned and colored as they are today until a hundred years later. St. Basil's is named after Vasily, the "holy fool" who predicted that Ivan would murder his own son.

Dinner tonight will be independent, followed by overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B – *Hotel Aquamarine or similar*

Day Three, Sunday **Moscow • Vladimir • Suzdal**

Following breakfast at the hotel, begin the journey to cities of the renowned Golden Ring. The **Golden Ring** is a modern name given to the ancient towns that form an elliptical loop to the north and east of Moscow. Many of these were seats of political and economic power long before the rise of Moscow. Today these are mostly quiet and sleepy towns dotted with the remnants of defensive kremlins, with active monasteries and with some of the oldest and most beautiful churches in Russia.

The first stop is **Vladimir**, founded in 1108 by the last great Kievan prince, Grand Duke Vladimir Monomakh. It was the Grand Duke's grandson – Andrei Bogolubsky, son of Prince Yuri – who actually developed the town when he moved the government seat from Kiev to this northern region. The capital of Kievan Rus' from the 12th to the 14th centuries, Vladimir subsided into a small provincial town after power shifted to Moscow. During the Soviet years it grew into an industrial and cultural center, and much of its wonderful old architecture has been preserved.

Observe the 12th century **Cathedral of the Assumption**, whose gilded domes were meant to show the exalted place that Vladimir held at that time, and the little **Cathedral of St. Demetrius** with its sculpted white stone walls. Street traffic still passes under Vladimir's **Golden Gate**, a testament to its impregnability against the Tatars, who were forced to break through the wooden walls instead.

Continue on to **Suzdal**. Time and weather permitting, make a short stop en route at Bogolubovo to view the lovely **Church of the Intercession on the Nerl**. This graceful little white stone church with its single dome is set in the middle of a meadow on a man-made hill by the River Nerl. Built in the 12th century by Prince Andrei Bogolubsky, the walls still have the original carvings. Considered one of the most perfectly proportioned churches in Russia, it was included in the "**White Monuments of Vladimir and Suzdal**" on the **UNESCO World Heritage List**.

Upon arrival in Suzdal, check in to the hotel and enjoy **dinner in a private home**.
Meals: B, L, D – *Pushkarskaya Sloboda or similar*



Day Four, Monday

Suzdal • Plyos • Kostroma

Explore Suzdal after breakfast today. Begin by visiting the **Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life**, an outdoor museum with examples of old wooden cottages, homes and churches, including the 18th century shingled and domed Church of the Transfiguration.

At the very heart of Suzdal is its **kremlin**, which may date to as far back as the 10th century. Inside the walls are several churches and historic buildings, such as the **Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral** and the **Archbishop's Chambers**.

From here depart for Kostroma. En route take some time to visit **Plyos**, known as the "pearl of the Volga." Plyos is in an area surrounded by lovely forests, valleys and fields. Here enjoy **lunch in a private home** and visit an example of a **Russian izba**, a log house.

Continue overland through the Volga River Valley and arrive in the early evening in **Kostroma**. In the 17th century Kostroma was the third largest town in Russia after Moscow and Yaroslavl. It enjoyed imperial patronage and was visited by Catherine the Great in 1767. Unfortunately most of the town, including the kremlin, burned down in a great fire in 1773. But this gave Catherine the Great a chance to exert her influence on Kostroma's appearance, and she transformed the city into a showpiece for her enlightened design principles with her best designers from St. Petersburg. Within a few years Kostroma had been rebuilt according to then-modern town planning methods, with streets radiating from a single focal point near the river. Thus Kostroma is recognized as one of the finest examples of late 18th century architectural principles in Russia.



Check into the hotel with time for an independent dinner.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Snegurochka or similar*

Day Five, Tuesday

Kostroma • Yaroslavl

This morning, begin the tour of Kostroma. Across the river from the main square is one of the city's main architectural attractions, the **St. Ipaty Monastery**. The monastery is associated with the Romanov family, who considered it their personal sacred place. It was here that messengers brought news of Mikhail Romanov's election to the Russian throne in March 1613. The central structure in the monastery is the **Trinity Cathedral**, built in 1652 on the site of the older church, which was destroyed in 1649 by an explosion of gunpowder kept in the cellars.

In the afternoon depart to the city of Yaroslavl. Upon arrival, see a magnificent panorama of white walls, golden domes, and towers belonging to the **Spassky (Savior) Monastery**. Originally founded in the



12th century, this is one of the Volga's oldest monasteries. The oldest of its remaining structures – the Holy Gate and the Transfiguration Cathedral – were built in 1516. The present monastery walls were built in the 17th century, after the city fortifications that withstood the Polish/Lithuanian siege of 1609 burned later in the century. In 1603 the boyar Mikhail Romanov, later to be the first in the Romanov dynasty, built a house within the monastery walls in 1603. In the 18th century, a manuscript of the earliest Russian epic, the 12th century “Tale of Igor’s Campaign,” was discovered in the library of the abbot.

Yaroslavl was founded in 1010 by Yaroslav the Wise of Kiev. In the 17th century Yaroslavl gained renown as the greatest *posad*, or artisans’ settlement, after Moscow. The many magnificent churches made the town’s stonemasons, carpenters and blacksmiths famous all over Russia. Explore a few of these wonderful churches, including the **Church of the Epiphany** and the **Church of St. Elijah the Prophet**. Yaroslavl’s historic town center is a **UNESCO Site**.

If time and weather permit, take a short **boat ride along the Volga River**.

Meals: B, L – SK *Royal Hotel, Alyosha Popovich Dvor Hotel, or similar*

Day Six, Wednesday

Yaroslavl • Rostov • Sergiev Posad

Depart to Sergiev Posad, stopping to explore **Rostov** on the way. Rostov is one of Russia’s oldest towns, and one of the most beautiful in northeastern Russia. Founded on Lake Nero in 862, Rostov is first mentioned in the oldest (Russian) Primary Chronicle, “The Tale of Bygone Years.” Rostov’s greatest contributions to Russian culture are its kremlin and the art of bell ringing, which spread throughout the Golden Ring. Built in the 17th century, the immense ensemble of the **Rostov Kremlin** took 30 years to build and used over twenty million bricks. Today about 33,000 people live in Rostov.

Later this afternoon arrive in the UNESCO-listed small town of **Sergiev Posad**, previously known as Zagorsk in Soviet times. The town grew around the **Trinity St. Sergius Lavra** (meaning “exalted monastery”) founded in the 1340s by St. Sergius of Radonezh, now the patron saint of Russia. The monastery occupies a special place in the spiritual, political and cultural life of the country, its history interwoven with that of Russia. This is where, in 1380, St. Sergius blessed Dmitri Donskoi’s army as it marched out to give the Golden Horde their first defeat in a century. It is where Czar Ivan the Terrible spent a fortune to have the monks pray for him after he murdered his son. It withstood a 16-month siege by Polish forces after Ivan strengthened its fortress walls, and continued to defend Moscow from attack for hundreds of years.

Upon arrival, tour a **matrioshka factory** and learn about the art of making these stacking dolls. Sergiev Posad has been a center of woodcarving and toy making for centuries – the first wooden toys were said to have been carved by St. Sergius – and continues to carry on this tradition today. It is also the best place to buy all types of wooden crafts, including *matrioshka* dolls.

The Trinity St. Sergius Lavra is one of the finest monuments of Russian culture. Its architectural ensemble includes the **Trinity Cathedral** (1423), built on the site of St. Sergius’ grave and frescoed by the most beloved of Russia’s icon artists, Andrei Rublev, the **Assumption Cathedral** (1585) with its blue and gold-starred domes, the **Metropolitan’s Chambers** (17th-18th century), and a five-tiered baroque **bell tower** (1740-1770) designed by Rastrelli to hold 40 bells.

Check into the hotel and have dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D – *Tsarskaya Derevnya Hotel or similar*



Day Seven, Thursday

Sergiev Posad • Fedoskino • Moscow • train to St. Petersburg

After breakfast at the hotel, depart for Moscow with a stop en route at Fedoskino, known as one of the



production centers of Russia's wonderful lacquer boxes. In the late 18th century when the dipping of snuff became popular in Russia, inexpensive snuffboxes were in demand, and several factories in Fedoskino began turning out boxes made of *papier-mache*. The primed boxes were perfect as bases for lacquer miniatures, an art that was perfected here, and in three other centers around Moscow and St. Petersburg. Fedoskino boxes and miniatures are usually painted in a realistic style, and use a multi-layered combination of transparent and opaque materials, sometimes incorporating gold leaf, silver foil or metal powder. Visit the **Museum of Fedoskino Lacquer Miniatures** to admire some of the city's finest.

Upon arrival back in Moscow, transfer to the train station and board the express train to St. Petersburg, departing in the late afternoon.

Arrive in St. Petersburg late tonight and transfer to the hotel. Enjoy a late dinner at the hotel upon arrival.

Meals: B, L, D (and snacks on the train) – *Hotel Helvetia or similar*

Day Eight, Friday

St. Petersburg • Peterhof • Pushkin

This morning after breakfast at the hotel depart to the city pier for the **hydrofoil to Peterhof**. On the way, get a quick look at some of the magnificent exteriors. St. Petersburg is often described as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Its miles of canals, laced together with graceful bridges set amidst 18th century buildings, have earned it the name, "Venice of the North."

The ride to Peterhof will take about forty-five minutes. Peter the Great built his estate, Peterhof, on a ridge by the Gulf of Finland 19 miles outside St. Petersburg. The former imperial residence is surrounded with extensive parks and gardens intended to rival Versailles, complete with an array of gilded statues, magnificent palaces and gravity-fed fountains.

Peter's **famed fountains** are Peterhof's main attraction. Over 150 glistening, gilded, sculpted marble, granite and limestone fountains and cascades adorn the Lower Park. The gravity-fed collection pools in Peterhof's Upper Garden discharge their waters nearly 50 feet down to the Lower Park's cascades and jets, creating enormous force and powering fountains all over the park.



The exterior of the massive Grand Palace was designed by Rastrelli, who also designed the Winter Palace. Have a look at Peter's first and favorite palace, the more modest **Monplaisir**, which sits directly on the bluff where Peter could observe passing ships.

After time for an independent lunch, continue to Pushkin, or Tsarskoye Selo (Czar's Village), the location of one of Russia's greatest cultural attractions, **Catherine's Palace**. Explore the palace, originally built in 1717 by Catherine I. In 1752, famed architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli enlarged and embellished the palace, extending the facade to its current grandeur. The estate and palace buildings were almost completely destroyed by the Germans during World War II, but they have been carefully and expertly restored into a brilliant architectural monument.

The fully restored **Amber Room** has been years in the making. The wall coverings of amber panels, created in the time of Peter the Great, were taken by the Nazis during the Second World War and never recovered. The beautifully crafted amber panels we see today were re-created from photos and descriptions of the originals, and have become one of the highlights of the palace.



Return to the hotel for an independent dinner. Tonight, **spend the evening at one of St. Petersburg's illustrious theaters**. Russia has long been known as a place where the arts are held in high regard. It is the home of some of the world's finest ballet companies, and Russian composers, musicians and opera singers have always held places in the pantheon of global cultural luminaries. (**Please note**, this evening at the theater may be moved to a different night, depending on performance schedules.)
Meals: B – *Hotel Helvetia or similar*

Day Nine, Saturday **St. Petersburg**

This morning begins with a visit to **Peter and Paul Fortress**, one of the first structures in St. Petersburg. Peter the Great laid the cornerstone of the earthen fortress on Hare Island in May 1703, intending it to be used to repel a Swedish invasion. After the Swedes capitulated, the fortress was transformed into a prison in 1718. Among its prisoners were Peter the Great's son, Alexei, who opposed his reforms.

After strolling the park-like grounds of the compound, visit the **Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul**, considered the heart of the fort. Starting with Peter the Great, all the Russian czars except Peter II and Ivan VI were entombed in the Cathedral. On July 17, 1998 the remains of Nicholas II and his family were returned from Ekaterinburg and laid to rest alongside the other members of the Romanov Dynasty.

Next, visit the **wooden house of Peter the Great**. Constructed in three days, this small timber house is the city's oldest structure. The cottage was later encased in stone and has been a museum since 1930. Here you will see furniture from the 18th century and some of the czar's personal effects.



Following lunch visit the exquisite **Usupoff Palace**, once owned by the very rich and powerful Usupoff family. Although ordinary looking from the outside, the palace interior is elaborate and ornate, with a marble staircase, crystal chandeliers, gilded candelabras and magnificently painted ceilings.

From here visit **St. Isaac's Cathedral**. Czar Alexander I awarded the building project to the inexperienced winner of a competition, a young French architect, Auguste Montferrand. The beautiful design was fraught with problems, and construction was halted for years while these were solved. New technology had to be invented to build the massive structure. The 48 red granite columns around the lower part of the building each weigh 110 tons, and the upper columns around the rotunda weigh 67 tons apiece. The dome is covered with 220 pounds of gold, and the interior columns faced with lapis lazuli and malachite. 200 artists contributed to the exterior and interior decoration, and the cathedral is bursting with sculptures, frescoes, stained glass works and woodcarvings. The cathedral took 40 years to complete.

Next visit the grand **Church of the Savior on the Blood**, just off of Nevsky Prospekt. The Church of the Savior on the Blood was built on the spot where Czar Alexander II was felled by a bomb in 1881, and was commissioned in the style of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow by his son and successor, Alexander III. Situated near the Griboyedov Canal, the emblematic cathedral with its blue and green patterned domes has become a symbol of St. Petersburg. The interior walls and cupolas are covered in fine mosaics of Biblical scenes, and four jasper columns mark the spot where the czar fell.

Time permitting, continue the tour with a stroll along **Nevsky Prospekt**, the three-mile avenue considered the backbone of St. Petersburg. Pass by Gostiny Dvor, the city's oldest and largest shopping center. Pause for shopping along the way. Later in the evening enjoy **dinner in a private home**.

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

Day Ten, Sunday St. Petersburg



photo: Jim Beers

Spend today exploring the **Hermitage Museum**. This great museum was originally a small private palace gallery begun by Catherine the Great with a purchase of 255 paintings from Berlin. The Hermitage today houses one of the largest museum collections in the world and includes works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, the French Impressionists such as Monet, Matisse and Renoir; Van Gogh, Matisse, Gauguin and Picasso. The fabulous rooms with their inlaid floors and gilded woodwork and the grand double entry staircase are works of art in themselves.

Break for an independent lunch at the Hermitage Cafe and **enjoy a free afternoon** to continue touring the museum or to enjoy St.

Petersburg on your own for last minute shopping or touring.

Tonight **celebrate the journey with a farewell dinner**.

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



Day Eleven, Monday
Depart St. Petersburg

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

Dates for 2017 – Three Departures – Cultural Series

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

May 26-June 5, 2017
July 7-17, 2017
September 1-11, 2017

Package Prices

4-16 passengers, \$5,995 per person, double occupancy
Single supplement \$1,095

Land Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- 10 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 6 dinners. A few lunches or dinners are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to dine 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 throughout the itinerary by private vehicle (vehicle size depends on group size).
- Train tickets, Moscow to St. Petersburg.
- Hydrofoil tickets, St. Petersburg to Peterhof, one-way (return by vehicle).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Baggage handling where available.
- 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.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international air fare is not included in the land tour cost).
- 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.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.



- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- 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.

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?

While the accommodations we utilize are superior tourist class, please keep in mind that some aspects of the tourism infrastructure in Russia are not up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; however you may encounter problems with bureaucratic service, road conditions and availability and quality of public restrooms. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets and sidewalks are uneven, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators.

We believe that this program is designed to be as comfortable as possible for travel in this region. It is rated as **rigorous touring** because of the daily walking involved, the length of some bus rides and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this schedule is 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 Russia, this may not always be possible.

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

Learn more about the destinations you are bound for by reading the country information pages at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country.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

Moscow, St. Petersburg and the Golden Ring are wonderful places to visit any time of the year. In summer and fall, expect flowers and fall foliage respectively. Temperatures in June and July typically range from 50-70 degrees and rain is definitely possible. September sees cooler temperatures, ranging from 45-60 degrees. Please remember, weather at all times of year is rather unpredictable.

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 Western Russia.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

At 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 \$297. 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.

Visa processing for this tour will generally take about one month. 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 the timing. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Somewhat extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for this visa, which requires a foreign government approval authorization to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassy/Consulate. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required.

Pre and Post-Tour Options

MIR can arrange for an extended program in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Eastern or Central Europe before or after your tour. Please call us for suggestions and rates.

Also Nearby...

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



Flexible Essential Trips – 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 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 twelve days on this compact overland journey through history. A remarkably complex region, the mountainous Balkan Peninsula is fascinating, diverse and incredibly beautiful.

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 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

A Chronicle of Russian Cuisine and Culture, 10 days. This delectable 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.

Bulgaria & Romania: Frescoes & Fortresses, 16 days. Explore the complex history and fascinating culture of Bulgaria and Romania, two Balkan countries whose rugged terrain and consequent isolation have helped preserve their heritage. Discover the luminous frescoes of the painted monasteries, breathe in the fragrance of the Valley of the Roses, and spend an afternoon visiting with villagers in a tiny Transylvanian town.

Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova, 13 days. Traverse a little known region that has changed hands from its earliest history. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are three of the least-frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Time slowed drastically here after the devastation of WWII, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.



Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2017 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.) Air fares 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 (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), 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).

30 Years of Experience

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.





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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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