



Experience Gobi & Gulag

Along the way
St Petersburg
Moscow
Perm
Ulaanbaatar
Beijing

Leaving from St. Petersburg to Beijing

Starting your trip in St. Petersburg gives you the opportunity to see the contrast between the imperial splendour and the soviet simplicity that existed both then and now.

Grim it may be, but for nearly half the world “Siberia” is synonymous with the Soviet-Era system of prison camps (which in fact had begun a century earlier under the Tsars). This trip visits the only remaining Soviet gulag, near Perm... but it's not all about barbed-wire and watchtowers! There's a relaxing “soft” rafting trip on the Usva River, the amazing beautiful Kungur Ice Caves (this is just an underground stroll, no scrambling involved), with the second half of the trip set in Mongolia as a complete contrast!



What's included

FULL ON

Train

- > 4-berth rail for complete journey (pre-assigned berths)
- > option to upgrade to 2-berth

St. Petersburg

- > transfer on arrival to your hotel
- > 2 nights 3★ hotel, breakfast
- > 3 hour personalised walking tour with local expert

Moscow

- > transfer on arrival to your hotel
- > 2 nights 3★ hotel, breakfast
- > 3 hour personalised walking tour with local expert
- > transfer to the station on departure

Perm

- > all transportation
- > two nights camping, equipment provided, all meals
- > 2 nights 3★ hotel, breakfast
- > excursion

Ulaanbaatar

- > all transportation
- > 2 nights Elstei Ger Lodge, all meals
- > 1 night 4★ hotel, breakfast
- > City tour of Ulaanbaatar

In the know...

Most Russian cities have fixed route minibus taxis, which you can hail or get out of anywhere along their route for a fixed fare.

The word Gulag makes you think of a concrete prison – the reality is horribly banal.

The Mongolian Empire established by Genghis Khan was the largest in recorded history – stretching from Budapest to Java. But the Mongols had no interest in ruling, only receiving taxes, and usually appointed locals to run things for them and collect the tribute.

China has had multiple capitals in its turbulent history, including Nanjing and Xi'an. Beijing became capital in a coup staged by the Manchus, who lived in the North of the country (Manchuria).



No ordinary trip

At The Russia Experience we like to ditch the clichés, discard the puff and concentrate on what we do best – bringing to life the world's longest train route: the places visited, the encounters made and the realisation of a journey that is both engaging and rewarding.

We continually look at ways of enhancing the Trans Siberian experience, incorporating seasonal considerations (such as the Harbin Ice Festival), providing the historical context (pay a visit to the only remaining Soviet Gulag) or inviting you to savour the diverse cultural influences of indigenous people (sit down with a shaman, or enjoy the Siberian art of throat singing!).

We have no group departures, our advertised dates always operate (barring anything completely out of our control) and, above all, we will tell you like it is – allowing you to make the right choice from a portfolio of journeys rich in variety and full of memorable experiences. Sorry! We couldn't resist at least one cliché!



Visa Requirements

Visitors to Russia, Mongolia and China require visas. These must be obtained prior to departure. Visa processing times for these countries can be up to;

Russia	25 Working Days
Mongolia	10 Working Days
China	10 Working Days

However fast track processing is possible.

Due to the support documents required by the Embassy of Russia (which we obtain), you will need to book your trip before starting to obtain visas.

For full information regarding visas, please refer to our web site.

Hints and Tips

TOP TIP! – You must be able to swim proficiently to take this trip due to the rafting content.

Inform us of your size before departure so we can have the correct waterproof clothes and boots ready for your arrival.

Photocopy your passport including the visas issued pages, airline tickets and insurance policies.

Your passport must be valid for at least six months past the end of your travel dates.

Travellers Checklist

Day pack, back pack, money belt, first aid kit, heat proof mug, instant coffee, tea bags, sun hat, mosquito repellent, lightweight jacket, flip flops, swim wear, sun cream, warm waterproof, walking boots, universal sink plug, bottle opener, photographs of home to show the Nomads. Mongolian children love bubbles!

Climate and time – Minimum/maximum Temperatures °C

	May/June	July/Aug	Sep/Oct
Moscow/St. Petersburg	+15/+22	+15/+30	+ 8/+24
Perm	+5/+20	+13/+20	+ 6/+14
Ulaanbaatar	+15/+24	+26/+42	+10/+25
Beijing	+15/+22	+24/+30	+ 8/+22

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full on itinerary – 19 days

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DAY 01

“S Priezdom! Welcome to St. Petersburg!” Our driver will be there to meet you from whichever flight, train or boat you arrive. You'll then be transferred to your hotel. At check-in, (after 2pm) the hotel reception will advise you they will need your passport for visa registration. This process takes 1–2 hours. Your complimentary InfoPack is full of ideas for getting the most out of your free time. (Please note your train tickets to Moscow will be delivered to the hotel during your two night stay.)

No meals

DAY 02

After breakfast one of our local expert staff will meet you at the hotel to take you on a three hour walking tour round the highlights – you'll use public transport around the centre to avoid the traffic jams and get the hang of the system for when you come to use it independently. Our staffers are full of ideas for this walk but are flexible about other ideas if you have your own. Your walk ends in the city centre around lunchtime. If you haven't pre-booked any of our range of city excursions the rest of the day is your own to explore further.

Breakfast

DAY 03

You'll need to check out of your room by 12 noon today but the hotel offers a Left Luggage service for a small fee. Your day is free until your evening departure to Moscow. Reception can book you a taxi to the station. Some of our top suggestions (please check opening times/days before setting off) The Hermitage Collection – Winter Palace. The canals and waterways of the “Northern Venice”. The Russian Museum of Fine Art. The Peter & Paul Fortress-and the Tombs of the Tsars inside the Fortress Cathedral. The Church on the Spilt Blood, nearby the Souvenir Bazaar.

Breakfast

DAY 04

Early morning arrival in Moscow. Our driver will meet you at the end of the platform and will be holding a meeting-board with your name on. You'll then be transferred to the Irbis 3★ Hotel. The facilities available at this hotel include a Restaurant, Lobby Bar, Lobby Wi-Fi access, Luggage Room, Safety deposit boxes and an ATM machine. One of our local expert staff will meet you at the hotel around 10am to take you on a three hour walking tour round the highlights – you'll use public transport around the centre to avoid the traffic jams and get the hang of the system for when you come to use it independently. Our staffers are full of ideas for this walk but are flexible about other ideas if you have your own. Your walk ends in the city centre around lunchtime. Check-in is after 2pm the hotel reception will advise you they will need your passport for visa registration. This process takes 1–2 hours. Your complimentary InfoPack is full of ideas for getting the most out of your free time. (Please note your Trans-Siberian train tickets will be delivered to the hotel during your two night stay.)

No meals

DAY 05

If you haven't pre-booked any of our range of city excursions the rest of the day is your own to explore further. Some of our top suggestions (please check opening times/days before setting off) would include visiting the Moscow Kremlin, the Tretyakov Gallery, the Pushkin Fine Arts Museum, or a boat trip along the Moskva River... perhaps locate some tickets for ballet, opera, circus or a concert this evening? As well as famous classical music traditions Moscow features on the touring schedules of world names in jazz, rock, pop and world music.

Breakfast

DAY 06

You'll need to check out of your room by 12 noon today but the hotel offers a Left Luggage service for a small fee. Your day is free until 4pm, when a driver is scheduled to take you to the station. This morning you can continue sightseeing – the Lenin Mausoleum is only open in the mornings, and getting there early (it's in Red Square) helps beat the queues.

Although there's a restaurant car service on board your train you may want to supplement this with some snacks, treats, and fresh fruit that you could buy today. Your transfer from the hotel to Yaroslavsky Station is scheduled for 4pm, so please be at the hotel reception where your driver will meet you and will assist your boarding of the Perm bound train.

Breakfast

DAY 07

Your first full day on board the Trans-Sib... There will be plenty of time to meet fellow travellers and hang out in the dining car which serves a variety of meals and snacks reasonably priced. Evening arrive in Perm where our driver will meet you at the end of the platform and will be holding a meeting-board with your name on. Transfer to the Hotel Ural, which is located in the cultural and historical centre of Perm. This property is close to Perm State Art Gallery, Regional History museum, Perm State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, and the Kama River embankment.

No meals

DAY 08

After breakfast you depart by car with a guide for a two day side trip. A rucksack or similar is recommended for your things, and you can leave heavier luggage at the hotel to collect in two days time. (Please check Hints & Tips above). The first visit is to the Kungur Ice Caves (approx 1.5 hrs from Perm) – but there is no scrambling involved, the entire complex is equipped with underground walkways and requires no caving abilities at all – but you'll want your fleece (and some robust shoes) as they're not called the Ice Caves for nothing! During the day you'll also pass a hilltop cathedral with magnificent views and a former political prison. Lunch is included en-route (there's a café at the Caves). Three more hours brings you to the Usva River – you can change your clothes whilst local staffers set up the raft. Only light paddling to steer is needed, the current carries you along, and you'll set up camp opposite the Rocky Cliffs tonight. Camp supper (singing is optional) and overnight in tents in the middle of the Ural Mountains.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

These dossiers are designed to provide you with a guide to our trips, the places visited, accommodation used and to give you a flavour of your daily itinerary. You will be travelling in parts of the world where the unanticipated and the unusual are all part of the experience and, as a result, the unexpected can happen and we may on occasions need to vary your plans. These dossiers do not form part of any contract.

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DAY 09

After breakfast we continue rafting along the Usva there are liberal opportunities for stops to see natural beauty-spots, wildlife, flowers and plants, along with a picnic lunch stop along the way. This section of the trip is through forest gorges where the river is the only access – there are no roads or villages. This evening you'll make a new camp (local staffers will set things up you can help if you want to) and enjoy a hot supper prepared by our rafting instructors.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 10

After breakfast the staff will strike camp and load the gear aboard the raft for the final short section to Mys – there's time to change into the dry clothes you wisely packed in a plastic bag two days ago while the staff pack-down the raft. Rendezvous with our driver, and you now continue by road to the Perm-22 Gulag Camp – the only surviving such camp it's possible to visit in Russia (there might be remains of others in the Arctic, but you would need to charter a helicopter for several days to reach them). The Perm-22 Camp is now independently maintained by a charity concerned with the welfare and history of political prisoners jailed by the USSR – the interiors of the former barracks have been converted to include displays about the Gulag system, and there is a short film in English they will show. You shouldn't expect a concrete prison – the reality of the Gulags is horribly banal, and consists of wooden huts the prisoners were forced to build themselves. There's a picnic lunch on the drive back to Perm, where you'll be reunited with your left luggage and accommodated at the Hotel Ural once again.

Breakfast

DAY 11

Today is free for you to relax and explore Perm – the city where the Great Siberian Trakt (the Post Road which preceded the railway) began. Visit the River Embankment to see where convict boats from Moscow would arrive at night – so locals wouldn't see the fettered convicts being marched onwards on foot to Siberia. On Sibirskaya Street there's a plaque marking the spot where the last Tsar's brother, Grand-Prince Michael, was arrested on the day

after the Tsar himself had been executed – Brits may note the loyalty of Michael's English secretary, who was offered his freedom but opted to follow the Grand-Prince to his death in front of a firing-squad. This evening transfer to the station where you will board the Ulaanbaatar bound train.

Breakfast

DAY 12–14

On board The Trans-Sib... the dining car is the heart of the train and great place to meet fellow travellers and locals alike, sharing your experiences of the journey so far with a few drinks, which no doubt will include some Vodka or Russian Champagne – and maybe smoked salmon and caviar too!

No meals

DAY 15

Early morning arrival in Ulaanbaatar. Our driver will meet you at the end of the platform and will hold a meeting-board with your name. Transfer from the station to a hotel with a chance to shower and have breakfast. This morning you will depart for your city tour at 10.30am. This includes the Gandan Monastery – the largest active Buddhist monastery in Mongolia. Afternoon transfer to Elstei Ger Lodge (70km).

Breakfast & Supper

DAY 16

With no specific activities planned you can choose to chill out, read, or go walking, or (for a small fee paid locally) you can go horse riding with local nomad horsemen. If you've not ridden before, this is a great chance to try it, and beginners are welcome – instruction is given, and you'll be accompanied while you're getting the hang of it. Horse riding is a central part of Mongolian culture to this day, so try hard not to miss this – it has none of the "horsey" connotations that equestrian sports sometimes have in Europe. A relaxed evening in the bar after supper – there are occasional impromptu performances of live Mongolian music, where you might hear the Morin Khuur (horse-head lyre), the cimbalom, or native Mongolian throat-singing, khoomei – an astonishing experience that's completely unique to the Mongolian steppes.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 17

Around 10am you make the return trip to Ulaanbaatar. Check into the Bayangol 4★ hotel. This is a great centrally located property and facilities include 5 restaurants, fitness centre, sauna and a supermarket. The balance of today is free to explore more of the city. You can choose to return to the heady atmosphere surrounding the Gandan Monastery (which you'll have already visited when you were in the capital last time), or visit the Choijin Monastery Museum, the Bazaar... log on and pick up your email in one of the numerous internet cafes on Peace Avenue, have a latte and French pastries in the new generation of new-age coffee stores, go souvenir shopping in the peculiar grandeur of the Central Department Store, or pick up some snack food for the train in the Store's food department... in the evening a wide range of traditional and new style Mongolian eateries are vying with European style places, Irish pubs and German beer halls to enjoy, usually with live music later on.

Breakfast

DAY 18

Early morning transfer to the station for the Beijing bound train. Time to leave the Capital On The Steppes – today's train journey meanders through amazing sun parched scenery of the Southern Gobi. Later that evening there comes the Chinese border formalities, after which you are free to get some sleep.

Breakfast

DAY 19

Don't oversleep today, as it's possibly some of the most spectacular scenery of the entire route, as you leave the desert scenery behind and pass by mountains and rice paddy fields. Afternoon arrival at Beijing Central Station. For services in China and beyond please refer to our web site or brochure.

No meals.