

## THE LEGENDARY TRANS-SIBERIAN: CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR SPECIAL - 2017

### OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 14 December 2017 – 8 January 2018

Tour Duration: 26 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$17,250

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,450

*The Legendary Trans-Siberian Express is a spectacular adventure from Beijing to Helsinki on one of the world's greatest railways. Our exclusive 26-day Christmas and New Year Special is our most popular 'Trans-Sibe' of all as we celebrate a white Christmas in Siberia and New Year's Eve in Red Square.*

To make the journey at this time of year is a sensational experience as we travel through a winter wonderland, conjuring up memories of Dr Zhivago. Among the highlights are a sleigh-ride through a snowy Siberian forest followed by a traditional Christmas with a local family, and an unforgettable New Year's Eve celebration in Moscow's Red Square. Russia in winter is simply glorious and a white Christmas is almost guaranteed. The train journey is spectacular as we journey through magnificent landscapes, and there is a distinct festive atmosphere on board as tourists and locals alike enjoy the holiday season. The other great advantage of making the trip at this time of year is the lack of other tourists. Often we enjoy the rare privilege of having famous sights such as the Great Wall of China virtually to ourselves!

Tour Fitness Level: Active

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## TOUR ITINERARY

### 14/12/2017 Australia – Singapore

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the flight to Singapore. On arrival we connect with our flight to Beijing.

### 15/12/2017 Singapore – Beijing (LD)

Depart Singapore SQ 800, 01.05

Arrive Beijing 07.10

After completing customs and immigration formalities at Beijing airport we transfer to our hotel. After check-in we visit the Silk Markets to shop for any extra items of warm clothing we may need. The bargains are remarkable! We then drive to the beautiful Summer Palace. This was the favourite retreat of the emperors and empresses during the hot summer months. At this time of the year it is equally beautiful and we have it virtually to ourselves. In the evening we enjoy dinner at a popular local restaurant.

Novotel Peace Hotel

Beijing

### 16/12/2017 Beijing (BLD)

This morning we take a stroll in the world's biggest public plaza, Tiananmen Square. Covering 100 acres and dating back to 1420, the square has witnessed many of China's most historic events. Entering the Gate of Heavenly Peace, we visit the extraordinary Forbidden City, the world's largest ancient palace structure. Covering 72 hectares and containing no fewer than 9,999 rooms, this incredible complex was built between 1407 and 1420 by an estimated one million labourers. Until 1924 it was the Imperial Palace for China's emperors and in 1987 was World Heritage listed by UNESCO. A visit here is never to be forgotten.

### 17/12/2017 Beijing (BLD)

After breakfast we drive out of Beijing and head for the incredible Great Wall of China. We visit the beautiful section at Mutianyu, which is far less touristy than many other parts. Built more than 2,000 years ago under the orders of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huamgdi, it remains one of the largest construction projects of all time and stretches an incredible 6,400 km. We have plenty of time to stroll on the ramparts and fully take in this Wonder of the World. We also enjoy an exclusive picnic in one of the watchtowers lining the wall. Returning to Beijing, we attend a stunning traditional Chinese folk show.

### 18/12/2017 Beijing (BLD)

Today is our last in Beijing and we spend much of it in the fascinating old part of the city, known as the Hutong, which we explore by cycle rickshaw. We also enjoy a traditional lunch in the home of a typical Chinese family.

### 19/12/2017 Depart Beijing – Ulaan Baatar (B)

This morning we board the Trans-Mongolian Express for the thrilling journey to Ulaan Baatar.

Depart Beijing Train 23, 11.22

As the train heads north towards the Mongolian border, we pass through mountainous countryside and enjoy several glimpses of the Great Wall. Now is the chance to read books, play games or retire to the dining car for drinks or a meal.

Arriving at Erlian, the Chinese/Mongolian border town, giant hydraulic lifts raise the train and the wheel bogies are changed to fit the wider gauge tracks in Mongolia. With Chinese and Mongolian border formalities completed, the train makes its way into the vast Gobi desert.

#### **20/12/2017 Arrive Ulaan Baatar (D)**

This morning we travel through the rolling steppes of Mongolia, which stretch 1,000 km north to south and 2500 km east to west. Yaks, camels and Mongolian horses dot the austere landscape. The few towns and traditional homes, or gers, which can be seen, are testimony to man's ability to adapt to and survive in almost any environment.

#### **Arrive Ulaan Baatar 14.40**

We transfer to our hotel with the rest of the day at leisure.

#### **Bayangol Hotel**

Ulaan Baatar

#### **21/12/2017 Ulaan Baatar (BLD)**

Today we explore the city, visiting the largest and most important Buddhist centre in Mongolia, the famous Gandan Monastery. We also drive up into the hills for a panoramic view of the city in the valley below. After lunch we head out of the city to the grasslands where we have an opportunity to meet villagers and local horsemen and watch a thrilling display of Mongolian horsemanship. We also take an exhilarating dog-sleigh ride across a frozen lake. In the evening we enjoy a beautiful folk show.

#### **22/12/2017 Ulaan Baatar (BLD)**

Today we further explore Mongolia's capital visiting the famous History Museum and Sukhe Bator Square. In the evening we board the train for our journey north to Russia.

#### **Depart Ulaan Baatar Train 263, 20.15**

#### **23/12/2017 Onboard train**

The train heads towards the Mongolian border town of Sukhe Bator, arriving in the early morning. Here there are thorough customs and passport inspections before we proceed to the Russian border town of Naushki, 5,900 km from Moscow. We pass through beautiful mountain scenery laced with conifer forest. Following the Selenga River along the valley floor, we reach Ulan Ude, capital of Buryatia.

#### **24/12/2017 Arrive Irkutsk (BLD)**

Early this morning we join the main Trans-Siberian railway line and head west towards mighty Lake Baikal. The train often skirts the shore of this vast lake, which contains 20% of the world's fresh water supply. The mountains and small decorative Russian houses provide a beautiful backdrop before the train rolls into Irkutsk, the capital of Eastern Siberia.

#### **Arrive Irkutsk 06.15**

On arrival we transfer to our hotel and after breakfast take a city tour. Once known as the 'Paris of Siberia', Irkutsk dates back to 1661. This afternoon we enjoy a classical music concert in a Siberian mansion.

#### **Hotel Intourist**

Irkutsk

#### **25/12/2017 Irkutsk (BL)**

#### **MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

Today is a very special day as we travel out of the city to beautiful Lake Baikal. In a snow-covered forest we enjoy an unforgettable experience: riding in horse-drawn

Russian sleighs, or troikas, while being entertained by the locals. After exploring the lake and the picturesque village of Listvyanka, we enjoy a traditional Christmas lunch with a fun-loving Siberian family. The festivities continue throughout the afternoon and into the evening!

#### **26/12/2017 Irkutsk (BLD)**

After breakfast we enjoy a tour of this charming city. Founded as a Cossack outpost, it continued to develop as a fur and gold trading city with access routes to Mongolia and China. Today the city is a regional cultural centre with theatres, museums and a symphony orchestra.

#### **27/12/2017 Depart Irkutsk (B)**

An early start this morning as we transfer to Irkutsk railway station and board the world's most famous train, the Trans-Siberian Express, for the epic journey to Moscow.

#### **Depart Irkutsk Train 1, 06.47**

Now is the time to relax and watch the winter wonderland outside. Life on the train is comfortable and fun-filled, with much merriment in both the dining car and in our compartments.

#### **28/12/2017 Onboard the Trans-Siberian Express**

The train pushes inexorably towards Moscow, passing through famous cities such as Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg, where Tsar Nicholas and his family were executed.

#### **29/12/2017 Onboard the Trans-Siberian Express**

The train now cuts through the foothills of the Ural Mountains and we pass the famous obelisk, marking the border of Asia and Europe. We are now 1,777 kilometres from Moscow.

#### **30/12/2017 Arrive Moscow (LD)**

##### **Arrive Moscow 06.01**

Finally the train rolls into Yaroslavsky Station, Moscow, at the end of its momentous journey. On arrival we transfer to our hotel. Late this afternoon we stroll into famous Red Square. Dating back to 1493, the magnificent square is flanked on one side by the red walls of the Kremlin and on the other by the majestic GUM department store. At one end is the imposing history museum and at the other is one of the world's most famous buildings, the unique St Basil's Cathedral. The square also houses Lenin's mausoleum.

##### **Metropol Hotel**

Moscow

#### **31/12/2017 Moscow (BLD)**

Our tour of Russia's magnificent capital begins this morning with a visit to the Church of Our Saviour. Following lunch we visit the famous pedestrian mall, Arbat Street, with its busy market stalls and fine shops. After dinner we walk to Red Square for the New Year celebrations – a night you will never forget as people of all ages flock to the square for a spectacular party.

#### **01/01/2018 Moscow (BLD)**

##### **HAPPY NEW YEAR. WELCOME TO THE YEAR 2018!**

After breakfast we travel outside Moscow to the stunning religious capital of Russia, Sergiev Posad. This is one of the country's most beautiful towns, particularly under a covering of snow.

#### **02/01/2018 Moscow (BLD)**

Our tour of Russia's magnificent capital begins this morning with a visit to the famous Kremlin. We also visit the great Armoury Museum, which houses Russia's crown jewels including the fabulous collection of Faberge eggs. After lunch we explore some of the palatial stations of Moscow's stunning underground system.

#### **03/01/2018 Moscow – St Petersburg (BL)**

Today we head out of Moscow to the beautiful estate of Kolomenskoye. Situated on the banks of the Moskva River, this was the summer residence of Alexei Romanov. This estate dates back to the 14th century and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the afternoon we transfer to the railway station for our journey to St Petersburg.

**Depart Moscow Train 768, 16.30**

**Arrive St Petersburg 20.25**

On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

**Helvetia Hotel**

St Petersburg

#### **04/01/2018 St Petersburg (BLD)**

After breakfast we take a city tour of beautiful St Petersburg. Formerly known as Petrograd and Leningrad, this most European of Russian cities is the country's intellectual and cultural heart. Perched on the banks of the Neva River, it is often referred to as the 'Venice of the North' because of its glorious canal system. We enjoy such sights as St Isaac's Cathedral, the Winter Palace and Peter and Paul's Fortress, where the bodies of Tsar Nicholas and his family are interred.

#### **05/01/2018 St Petersburg (BLD)**

Today we travel out of St Petersburg to the town of Pushkin where we visit the beautiful palace of Catherine the Great. We explore the palace interior, including the recently-restored and magnificent Amber Room. This evening there may also be the opportunity to attend a performance by one of the great St Petersburg ballet companies.

#### **06/01/2018 St Petersburg (BLD)**

This morning we visit the Winter Palace. Completed in 1762, the palace was home to the Tsars until the Russian Revolution in 1917. It now houses the Hermitage Museum, arguably the world's greatest art collection. The afternoon is at leisure, providing the option of spending more time in the Hermitage. Others may prefer to stroll down the city's great boulevard, Nevsky Prospekt. In the evening there is the opportunity to attend a traditional Cossack folk show.

#### **07/01/2018 Depart St Petersburg – Moscow (B)**

Early this morning we transfer to the airport for our flight home via Moscow and Singapore.

**Depart St Petersburg Aeroflot, S7 48, 10.10**

**Arrive Moscow 11.40**

**Depart Moscow Singapore Airlines SQ61, 15.20**

#### **08/01/2018 Singapore – Australia**

**Arrive Singapore 05.45.**

Connect with your flight back to Australia.