

THE LEGENDARY TRANS-SIBERIAN: NAADAM FESTIVAL - 2017

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 30 June 2017 – 27 July 2017

Tour Duration: 28 days

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

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

The Legendary Trans-Siberian Express is a spectacular adventure from Beijing to Moscow on one of the world's greatest railways. Our July departure is timed to coincide with Mongolia's annual Naadam Festival: a spectacular display of horsemanship, wrestling, archery and colourful traditional costumes.

The July Trans-Siberian is one of our most popular summer tours and it is not difficult to see why. In addition to all the normal highlights of this amazing adventure, the annual Naadam Festival is a dazzling display of colour, sportsmanship and pageantry beginning with the spectacular opening ceremony. The Trans-Siberian railway trip is without doubt the world's greatest train ride: an epic 9,000 km journey through the very heart of Asia and into Europe. The 'Legendary Trans-Siberian' was the first escorted adventure we organised 25 years ago, and it remains one of our most popular tours. The journey takes us from Beijing to Moscow with stopovers in Beijing; Mongolia; the capital of Eastern Siberia, Irkutsk; and St Petersburg. The entire tour is packed full of highlights as the journey unfolds across the face of the world. Many travellers use our very flexible Singapore Airlines ticket to explore other parts of Europe at the conclusion of the tour.

Tour Fitness Level: Moderate

THE LEGENDARY TRANS-SIBERIAN: NAADAM FESTIVAL 2017

TOUR ITINERARY

30/06/2017 Australia – Singapore

Check-in at your chosen Australian airport for the flight to Singapore. On arrival we connect with our flight to Beijing.

01/07/2017 Singapore – Beijing (LD)

Depart Singapore on Singapore Airlines SQ 800, 01.05

Arrive Beijing 07.20

After completing customs and immigration formalities at Beijing airport we transfer to our hotel. After check-in, the rest of the morning is at leisure. After lunch 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. At one end is the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the entrance to the Forbidden City. At the other is the mausoleum, which houses the embalmed body of Mao Tse-Dong. Dinner this evening is in a popular local restaurant.

Novotel Peace Hotel

Beijing

02/07/2017 Beijing (BLD)

After breakfast we tour the beautiful Summer Palace, the largest and best-preserved imperial garden in China. Located on the western edge of the city, it was used as a summer residence by China's emperors as a cool retreat from the main imperial palace. One of the highlights is the 'Long Corridor', a 720-metre covered walkway decorated with more than 8,000 individual paintings. The Summer Palace was World Heritage listed by UNESCO in 1998.

03/07/2017 Beijing (BLD)

The extraordinary Forbidden City, the world's largest ancient palace structure, covers 72 hectares and contains 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. In the afternoon we tour the fascinating old part of the city, known as the Hutong. Cycle rickshaws take us on a delightful trip through the ancient narrow streets. This evening we have dinner in the home of a Chinese family.

04/07/2017 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 Huangdi, 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 while dining on Peking Roast Duck.

05/07/2017 Beijing – Ulaan Baatar (B)

Depart Beijing Train 3, 07.40

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

06/07/2017 Arrive Ulaan Baatar – Dugana (LD)

This morning we travel through the rolling grassy steppes, which stretch 1,000 km north to south and 2,500 km east to west. Yaks, camels and Mongolian horses dot the austere landscape. The few towns and gers to be seen are testimony to man's ability to survive in, and adapt to, almost any environment.

Arrive Ulaan Baatar 13.20

On our arrival in Ulaan Baatar we transfer to our delightful ger camp in the beautiful Dugana National Park

Dugana Ger Camp

Mongolia

07/07/2017 Dugana Ger Camp (BLD)

This glorious area of the Gobi is a paradise for nature lovers. Today is completely at leisure, although we have the opportunity to ride Mongolian horses, practise a little archery, enjoy a walk, or just relax on the steps of our gers and soak up the atmosphere.

08/07/2017 Dugana – Ulaan Baatar (BLD)

We drive back to Ulaan Baatar today and explore the Mongolian capital. This afternoon we will drive up into the hills for a spectacular view of the city in the valley below. In the evening we enjoy a beautiful folk show.

Bayangol Hotel

Ulaan Baatar

09/07/2017 Ulaan Baatar (BLD)

Today we continue to explore the city, visiting the largest and most important Buddhist centre in Mongolia, the famous Gandan Monastery.

10/07/2017 Ulaan Baatar (BLD)

After breakfast we continue our exploration of the capital visiting the famous History Museum and Sukhe Bator Square.

11/07/2017 Depart Ulaan Baatar (BLD)

Every year on 11 July Mongolians celebrate 'Naadam'. Meaning 'recreation', the Naadam Festival is a spectacular event that attracts the country's top wrestlers, archers and horsemen and women for five days of fierce competition. One of the features is the grand Opening Ceremony, which we attend. After the festivities we transfer to the railway station for our journey north to Russia.

Depart Ulaan Baatar Train 361, 19.35

The train heads north towards the Mongolian border town of Sukhe Bator, arriving early the next morning.

12/07/2017 Onboard the train

This morning there are thorough customs and passport inspections before we proceed to the Russian border town of Naushki, 5,900 km from Moscow. Entering Russia 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.

13/07/2017 Arrive Irkutsk (BLD)

Arrive Irkutsk 07.35

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. 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

14/07/2017 Irkutsk (BLD)

This morning we drive out of Irkutsk to the pretty village of Listvyanka on the shores of Lake Baikal. Formed some 25 million years ago, Baikal is the world's deepest lake and almost every statistic about it is astonishing. We enjoy an informative briefing about the lake on a visit to the excellent Limnological Museum.

15/07/2017 Depart Irkutsk

Early this morning we transfer to the railway station and board the Trans-Siberian Express.

Depart Irkutsk Train 1, 06.45

Now is the time to sit back, relax and watch the world go by as the train begins its epic journey across Siberia to Moscow.

16/07/2017 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.

17/07/2017 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.

18/07/2017 Arrive Moscow (BLD)

Arrive Moscow 05.52

Finally the train rolls into Yaroslavsky Station, Moscow, at the end of its momentous journey. On arrival we transfer to our hotel and the rest of the morning is at leisure. After lunch we stroll into 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.

Budapest Hotel

Moscow

19/07/2017 Moscow (BLD)

This morning we take a city tour including a visit to the Cathedral of Christ Our Saviour, which was re-built between 1994 and 2000 after Stalin had the original blown up in 1931 to make way for a massive monument to Lenin that was never built. The views of the Kremlin and the Moskva River from the top ramparts of the cathedral are quite extraordinary. The afternoon is at leisure.

20/07/2017 Moscow (BLD)

This morning we continue to explore Russia's magnificent capital, visiting the famous Kremlin and the great Armoury Museum, which houses Russia's crown jewels. After lunch we see some of the palatial stations of Moscow's stunning underground system, and visit Arbat Street – the famous pedestrian mall with its busy market stalls and fine shops. We also take a boat cruise on the Moskva River.

21/07/2017 Moscow (BLD)

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. Here we witness a traditional Russian wedding.

22/07/2017 Moscow – St Petersburg (BLD)

This morning we have a last opportunity to take a stroll in Red Square or buy some last-minute souvenirs. In the afternoon we transfer to the railway station for our journey to St Petersburg.

Depart Moscow Train 158, 13.30

Arrive St Petersburg 17.40

On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

The Angleterre Hotel

St Petersburg

23/07/2017 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 sights such 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.

24/07/2017 St Petersburg (BLD)

Today we board a hydrofoil for a trip down the Neva River to Peterhof. This is the site of the magnificent Summer Palace, playground of the tsars and tsarinas. The beautiful gardens are comparable with those at the palace of Versailles and the amazing fountains provide a great spectacle.

25/07/2017 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.

26/07/2017 St Petersburg – Moscow – Singapore (B)

This morning we fly from St Petersburg to Moscow. If returning immediately to Australia, we connect with our flight to Singapore in the afternoon.

Depart St Petersburg Siberia Airlines S7 48, 10.05

Arrive Moscow 11.50

Depart Moscow Singapore Airlines SQ 61, 15.20

27/07/2017 Singapore – Australia

Arrive Singapore 05.45

On arrival in Singapore we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian capital.

THE LEGENDARY TRANS-SIBERIAN

What is the cost of upgrading to twin berth on the train?

The cost of upgrading on the entire journey is AUD \$1,715pp.

If I travel alone, do I have to pay the single supplement?

If you do not want to share a hotel room with another person in the group, you will have to pay the single supplement. However, if you are willing to share we will team you up with another passenger of the same gender in the hotels. If a match-up is not possible, we will upgrade you at our expense.

Why are meals on the trains not included and how much do they cost?

We don't include the meals on the train because the days are not so structured and people like to eat at different times. Also, as you are not exercising, you don't need so much food. Meals on the train are cheap (around USD \$8 - 10). Cheap snacks can also be purchased at some stops. In addition some people like to take packet soups and pot noodles on the train, which are easily prepared with boiling water from the samovars located in each carriage.

Do I need vaccinations for this journey?

No vaccinations are mandatory on this route but we would recommend you seek advice from your doctor. Tetanus should certainly be up to date and a flu jab is useful to help prevent colds.

What is the climate like at the various times of the year?

The temperatures can vary along the entire route. In Beijing, it can be a lot warmer than Mongolia and Russia, with temperatures typically ranging from mid-teens to mid-20's during the day. Our pre-departure information booklets will provide specific temperature and weather guides for your trip.

Do I have to fly straight home from St Petersburg?

No. We encourage our travellers to take advantage of this great location for further travel in Europe and will arrange for passengers to return home from any city in Europe that Singapore Airlines serves. All we ask is that you nominate a city and a return date before you leave Australia. These dates can be changed, however, and the ticket is valid for one year. 'Add-ons' are relatively inexpensive and easily organised.

I have been to Beijing before. Can I join the tour later and avoid this section?

Yes, you can fly to Beijing later and join the tour prior to the departure for Mongolia. We can advise on the saving depending on which night you join.

I want to leave the tour in Moscow. Is this possible?

Again, this is not a problem. We can easily arrange a flight out of Moscow as well as St Petersburg.

I heard that visas are difficult to obtain. Is this the case?

A Russian visa can be difficult to obtain, but because we arrange all this paperwork there is no need to worry. We also organise the Chinese and Mongolian visas. However, we require your passport three months before departure in order to process the visas.

A lot of companies have many expensive optional extras on their tours. Do you?

We don't believe in a lot of expensive 'optional tours'. Our itineraries are designed to make the best possible use of time and to include all the must-see sights, plus additional surprises. Therefore, practically everything is included in the tour cost. However, if there is a ballet on in St Petersburg that you would like to attend, for instance, we can book it for you, but it would be at your own expense.

Is the water safe to drink en-route and what is the general standard of hygiene?

We err on the side of caution on all of our tours and advise travellers to drink only bottled water. This is easy to obtain everywhere. It should be noted that the water in St Petersburg, particularly, should not be drunk from the tap. However, the standard of hygiene is surprisingly high along the entire route.

Is it possible to have a shower on the trains?

There are no showers for travellers on the train, however the washrooms are spacious and there are two per carriage. Hot water is always available so keeping clean is not a problem.

I've heard that some trains in Russia and China are of a poor standard. Is this true?

Yes, some trains in Russia, Mongolia and China are not up to the same standard as trains in Australia and can be very poor. However, we schedule our tours to coincide with the timetables of the very best trains in these countries.

What is the security like on the train?

Security is first class on the trains. On the Trans-Siberian Express there are two permanent security guards. However, we still urge basic precautions such as locking your compartment when visiting the dining car.

What is the standard of the hotels?

We choose our hotels for their central locations, which we believe is very important. They are generally 3-4 star quality (or better), comfortable, clean and all with en-suites.

What currency do I need to take?

Both Euros and US dollars are easily changed into the local currency in every country en-route. Euros are generally more popular now, which is why we encourage you to take your cash in this currency.

How much spending money do I need for the entire trip?

Because almost everything is included, we would suggest an amount of 600 Euros per person as being ample for the whole month-long journey. However, if you are a keen shopper and like to buy local goods and souvenirs, you may require more.

Are credit cards acceptable?

Credit cards are widely accepted throughout the journey and ATMs are available along the entire route. However, we don't recommend relying on these as your main source of funds. It is advisable to take some cash.

Are there internet facilities en-route?

All the hotels we use have internet facilities. There are also many internet cafes in the vicinity of the hotels we use, which generally offer cheaper access.

Do mobile telephones work?

Telstra and Optus mobiles work throughout the entire journey except at our Dugana camp in Mongolia and some parts of the train journey. You will need to ensure you have global roaming. Contact your service provider for further details.

How much should we tip the guides and porters?

There is no need to tip guides or porters as all tips and gratuities are included in the tour cost.