

General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: IWBZF

Trip Length: 10

Trip starts in: St Petersburg

Trip ends in: Moscow

Meals: 7 Breakfasts included

1 Lunches included

5 Dinners included

Accommodation: Hotel (6 nights), Guesthouse (1 night), Overnight Sleeper Train (2 nights)

Transport: Train, Private Bus, Public Bus, High Speed Train, Taxi, Metro

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

St Petersburg

Welcome to Russia! The former imperial capital and cultural heart of Russia, St Petersburg is the perfect place to get started on this Russian Real Food Adventure. Get acquainted with Russian cuisine this evening with a classic dinner. Though the exact dishes will change depending on available produce and the time of year, it's guaranteed to be hearty and satisfying.

Day 2

St Petersburg

Today you'll dig into authentic Russian food and culture on a tour that takes you from the oldest market in town to a local's home for dinner. St Petersburg has changed drastically over the years, from Imperial Russia through Soviet rule to the modern city of today. But one thing has remained fairly consistent: the food! Sample local delicacies and staples at the market before exploring the harsh Soviet architecture woven throughout the city. In the evening, sit down to eat with a typical St Petersburg family, enjoying a home-cooked meal paired with vodka, Crimean wines, kvass (a fermented rye-based beverage) and birch juice. Play some traditional table games and experience how food and culture intertwine in this unique city.

Day 3

St Petersburg - Overnight Train

Spend the afternoon as you wish in St Petersburg. The technical splendour of the Church of the Savior of the Blood is a must-see. Featuring a design inspired by medieval Russian architecture and floor to ceiling mosaics inside, this late 19th-century structure is a church unlike any other in the world. Ask your leader for advice on where to grab a meal, a drink or both. Maybe ask them to point you in the direction of a good beef stroganoff, a classic east European comfort food. You will also want to pay a visit to the opulent Eliseyev Emporium, just 5 minutes from your hotel. A classic of early 20th century art nouveau architecture, the emporium is a food lover's paradise with vendors galore and St. Petersburg's most extravagant food hall. It's a good idea to stock up on snacks too, as this evening you'll board an overnight train bound for Vladimir. It's a 13-hour journey, so while you'll likely be sleeping for the majority, it's a good idea to pack a good book or download a podcast to occupy yourself. NOTES ON TRAIN TRAVEL: Trains on this journey are simple but comfortable. You'll travel 2nd class on this trip. There's a toilet/bathroom at the end of each carriage with a small sink and cold water. An attendant is assigned to every carriage to look after your comfort and safety (although service standards can vary greatly). Each compartment has four bunks with luggage storage space inside. Bedding is provided, although some travellers still prefer to bring their own sleeping sheet. There's hot water available for making drinks or instant meals, tea and coffee. Sometimes snacks and drinks are available for purchase on board and most trains also have a dining car, although with a limited menu. Trains are generally heated but most do not offer air conditioning. The train can become very hot even in winter and the train attendants will not allow the windows to be opened, please pack clothing appropriate for the warmer conditions on these train journeys. A brief word about drinking on the train: Social drinking is common on trains in Russia and can be an enjoyable way to meet local people as well as interact with your fellow Intrepid travellers (in moderation). While alcohol is often available for purchase on the train, spirits (including vodka) should only be consumed in the dining car. While we certainly want all our Intrepid travellers to have a great holiday it's important that you show due respect for your fellow group members, and keep in mind that many of your local companions use the train as a means of transport to get home or to work.

Day 4

Suzdal

Arrive in Vladimir in the morning and take a private bus to get to Suzdal (30km, approximately 40 minutes). An ancient town with wooden houses and pretty churches, Suzdal has none of the Soviet-era apartment blocks and stark buildings that decorate other parts of Russia. The food traditions here reflect the architecture: vintage. It's fitting then that a walking tour of this storybook town ends with the chance to sample mead – the Russian medieval tippable of choice. Later, join a family in their home and learn to make perhaps the most divisive (among foreigners) of all eastern Europe's dishes – borscht. This demonstration is hands on, taking you from the kitchen to the garden to learn about foraging traditions.

Day 5

Suzdal - Overnight Train

Enjoy a free morning to wander and snap photos in stunning Suzdal. While you're here, maybe spend a little time within the walls of the Suzdal Kremlin. This World Heritage-listed citadel was initially constructed in the 10th century, though its oldest preserved building is the Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral, which was built in the early 13th century. The blue domes that top this church are decorated with gold stars, making for a whimsical and unique house of worship. Grab some snacks for the overnight train journey though there is a dining car on the train with simple but sufficient food. You will go back to Vladimir by private van (30km, approximately 40 minutes). Depending on the train schedule, you will either take high speed train from Vladimir to Nizhny Novgorod (2hrs) and then overnight train to Kazan (9 hrs) OR high speed train Vladimir to Moscow (1.5 hours) and then overnight train to Kazan (12 hrs).

Day 6

Kazan

Pull into Kazan in the morning and take a private bus to the hotel (15 minutes). Rooms might not be ready on arrival so have some rest and set out on a walking tour, taking in the colour and East-meets-West charm of the capital of Tatarstan. As a region that is somewhat independent from the rest of Russia, the culture and food here has its own distinct flavour. During your walking tour you'll stop in at a standard Soviet-style canteen where you can try some Tatar staples. This is a fantastic place to eat like a local and try a variety of dishes such as soups, salads, local pies, laghman (pulled noodles with meat and veges) and, of course, chak-chak. A regional specialty, chak-chak is made of small balls of deep-fried, unleavened dough. These are pressed together to form a dome or tower, then smothered with honey and left to harden. This dish is a point of pride in Tatarstan. In the evening try your hands at making some of the Tatar special dishes (including ecpochmak, chak chak or lagman, the choice of dishes will depend on availability)

Day 7

Kazan

Today, venture into a nearby village to enjoy a social lunch with a Tatar family. Forming half the population of Tatarstan, they are one of many Turkic-speaking ethnic groups in Russia. In 1552, the city of Kazan was conquered by Ivan the Terrible, and the Tatar became the first Muslim subjects of Russian Empire. Today, Tatar people are as diverse as their Russian counterparts. In some areas, such as the village we will visit today, they have preserved a traditional way of life, including recipes handed down over generations. Eat and chat with your hosts, learning more about their culture and way of life.

Day 8

Moscow

In the morning take a private bus to the airport and board a flight to the Russian capital (1.5 hours). Have a private bus transfer to the hotel and get ready to explore this vast city! Moscow has survived centuries of revolution and seen Russia through some of its most turbulent years, from tsardom to communism and today's contemporary society. Central Moscow may be modern in parts, but its fascinating, historic heart hosts a wealth of sights. Get into the spirit (literally) with a Zakuska and Vodka tasting tour of the city in the evening. Learn how to walk, talk, drink and party like a Russian. Your local guide will teach you how to do shots the Russian way (by saying a special toast!) and you'll pair the drinks with tasty local snacks. Discover hidden gems and pass by some of the city's most famous icons, including the legendary KGB building.

Day 9

Moscow

Spend your final day in Moscow visiting some well-known attractions. Visit the imposing and macabre Lenin Mausoleum, the grand, red-granite tomb that houses the embalmed body of the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution. Take a guided tour of the Kremlin's Armoury Chamber, where treasures combed from both imperial and church vestries are on display. There are a range of ceremonial garments, vestments of the Russian Orthodox Church Hierarchs, armour, carriages and more. Work up your appetite with a day of sightseeing, then enjoy a final dinner with your leader and fellow travellers, practising your new skills and giving a Russian toast to new friends and new flavours. Special Information On occasion Lenin's Mausoleum and Red Square may be closed to the public during regular opening hours without prior warning. As Moscow's premier tourist attractions, tickets for the Kremlin and Armoury are in high demand, and the Moscow Tourism Administration sets strict quotas to control visitor numbers. Time in each area is also limited to 90 minutes. While we appreciate that some travellers would like to spend longer in the Armoury Museum, we ask for your understanding that the guide is under pressure to keep to the schedule. The Diamond Fund isn't included in your tour, but after the Kremlin and Armoury there may be time to visit. Entrance tickets can be purchased in the ticket office at the Armoury. The Diamond Fund is open for visitors from 10am-1pm and from 2pm-4pm. On Thursday it is closed.

Day 10

Moscow

There are no activities planned for the final day and you are able to depart the accommodation at any time. As there is plenty to see and do, staying a few extra days to enjoy everything Moscow has to offer is highly recommended. There are endless cultural treasures on offer – perhaps join an Urban Adventure tour to help you get to grips with this vast city.

Additional Information

Included Activities

Market tour and lunch at local family
Informal Russian language lesson
Suzdal - Russian Dinner & Borsht making
Suzdal - Guided walking tour
Kazan - Guided walking tour
Kazan Kremlin
Kazan - Village visit & traditional Tatar lunch
Zakuska & Vodka tasting
Moscow - Lenin's Mausoleum
Moscow - Kremlin & Armoury Guided Tour
Dinner at a local restaurant

Optional Activities

Moscow - River Cruise
Moscow - Bolshoi Theatre
Moscow - Entrance Kremlin Grounds
Moscow - St Basils Cathedral
Moscow - Tretyakov Art Gallery
Moscow - Modern Moscow Urban Adventure
Moscow - Moscow Behind the Icons Urban Adventure
Moscow - Moscow Underground Urban Adventure
Armoury Museum

Notes for Russia

Adventure holidays to Russia, the colossal land behind the Iron Curtain for so many decades, offers the traveller grand cities, graceful buildings, incredible museums, historic monuments and a vast landscape. From the colourful domes of St Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin in Moscow, to the ancient capitals of the Golden Ring, the cultural attractions of St Petersburg and the medieval treasures of Novgorod, Russia is packed-full of highlights. These, and the incredible scenery along the Trans-Siberian Railway travelling the vast Russian steppe to Beijing, ensures that an adventure tour to Russia will leave you with powerful memories of this enigmatic and often-misunderstood nation.

Citizens of the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and all EU countries will need a visa to enter Russia as a tourist for up to 30 days - this will need to be obtained in advance. Citizens of the UK and Denmark will need to make an appointment in person at their nearest Russian visa processing centre to give fingerprint scans - please see more information on <http://www.rusemb.org.uk> or <http://ru.vfsglobal.co.uk>. Citizens of other countries should check whether a visa is required - if so then you will need to be obtain it in advance.

Important Notes

The routes, activities and places visited as described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, and information about kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

These notes are updated regularly, so please ensure you have an up-to-date version of these trip notes.

The planned route and itinerary is the intention, but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed. It occasionally happens that there must be a change to our planned itinerary - this may be for a variety of reasons, such as climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions. By their very nature, adventure travel needs to be approached flexibly and some regions can be unpredictable. Some Imaginative Traveller journeys go through off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure and less stringent safety standards than we are used to at home.

Our Groups

Our groups are made up of people from around the world and are usually an interesting mix of nationalities and ages. On average there is a pretty even split, males to females and between solo travellers, couples and small groups of friends. We believe that adventure travel should be open to as many people as possible and so although some trips have a minimum age limit, as long as you are fit, healthy and passionate about travel, we are happy to take you. One of the highlights of group travel is the camaraderie and friendships that are formed along the way, and as well as the variety of people that you will meet.

The maximum group size depends on the operator and the style of transport, but will usually be a maximum of 15-16 or up to 21-22 on our overland journeys.

Accommodation

Imaginative Traveller trips are designed for shared accommodation, whether staying in hotels, hostels, homestays or campsites, and therefore do not involve a single supplement. Single travellers will share with people of the same sex for the duration of the trip and those that book together will usually be able to share accommodation.

The type, variety and standard of accommodation will vary greatly depending on what options are available in the region you are travelling; hotels can vary from very basic rooms without electricity or running water to high standard hotels with good facilities! Generally in hotels most rooms will be twin-share. Hostels, gers and yurts are nearly always multi-share.

Many trips will feature a stay in a local homestay or community tourism initiative, allowing us to experience a slice of local life in the areas we travel through. On our overland trips, we will sometimes camp in campsites ranging from rather basic or even wild camps to those with excellent facilities, including swimming pools, restaurants and bars.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any dietary requirements please tell us at the time of booking and also remind your leader at your welcome meeting. Our crew will try to cater for any particular dietary requirement or food intolerance whenever possible.

Health

You need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in our trips. When selecting your trip

please make sure you have read through the itinerary carefully and assessed your ability to cope with the style of travel on that trip. We are always happy to give extra advice if you have additional concerns. Please note that if, in the opinion of our leader, you are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to yourself and/or the rest of the group, Imaginative Traveller or our partner operators reserve the right to exclude you from all or part of the trip.

You should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information prior to travel, particularly if you have a pre-existing medical condition. We also advise you to declare any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurers upon purchase.

Altitude

Imaginative Traveller offers some trips that travel to above 2,800m altitude above sea level - it is imperative at high altitudes to drink lots of water to stay hydrated, be careful not to get burned by the sun, and try not to exert yourself too much. Some pre-existing medical conditions are known to severely worsen at high altitude and be difficult to adequately treat on the ground, leading to more serious consequences. It is imperative that you discuss your pre-existing medical condition/s with your doctor. We understand certain medications are reported to aid acclimatising to high altitude; please discuss these options with your doctor.

Yellow Fever

A valid international certificate of vaccination against Yellow Fever is required in many countries. You may need to present this on arrival at the airport or border crossing. Some countries will refuse entry if you are unable to present your certificate - please see each country's note above for details. It's also quite common for your home country to request a Yellow Fever certificate on your arrival back home.

It is your responsibility to check with your doctor well in advance of leaving home about the Yellow Fever requirements for the countries you'll be visiting.

Malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases

Some areas we travel to have the risk of contracting malaria. If this applies to your trip, please get expert advice before travelling about types of malaria pills and take them as instructed. Recommended types do change from time to time and from area to area. Consult your GP / travel clinic for the most up-to-date requirements and to find the right option for you. If advised by your doctor to take a course of anti-malarial tablets, please complete the course as instructed as malaria can often manifest itself upon your return home if the course is not followed.

Other mosquito-borne diseases such as Dengue Fever, Chikungunya and Zika are continuing to spread and becoming a bigger problem around the world. Bite prevention is vital to avoid contracting any of these diseases as there are no vaccines or specific treatments available. Health professionals have issued warnings for pregnant women travelling to areas affected by the Zika virus.

The mosquito usually bites between the hours of dusk and dawn and so covering up by wearing long-legged and long-sleeved clothing, preferably light coloured and buttoned at the wrists, can help. Do not sleep without closing windows, use a mosquito net where possible and use mosquito repellent applied directly to your skin or soaked into your clothing.

Vaccinations

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection vary according to different regions and recent bulletins issued by health authorities. It is essential to get the latest advice on the region(s) you are planning to travel in so please check with either your doctor or travel clinic in good time before you travel.

We also recommend you check out any specific health advice for the country you are travelling to either via your GP or the following websites: www.nathnac.org or www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

In the UK, we have been working with Nomad Travel for many years and their website has comprehensive,

up-to-date vaccination and health information. You will receive a 10% discount off all vaccinations given at Nomad Travel clinics.

Activities

Included activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary, all other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not necessarily be refunded; this is something you will need to check with your leader.

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Please note that certain activities may not be available on your particular visit if they are overbooked, underbooked, out of season, or for any other reason - the list of activities is made according to our latest information and in the best faith, but please be aware that things may change between our last visit and your arrival. Please also note that it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination, and it is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there.

If you do any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have comprehensive travel insurance. Without evidence of valid travel insurance you will not be allowed to start the trip. This can be arranged by Imaginative Traveller through our website or by contacting our team of travel consultants.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should have a minimum medical (including repatriation) cover of £2,000,000. We recommend that any policy also has a minimum level of cover for Personal Liability of £2,000,000 and for Cancellation and Curtailment of £5,000. Cover for loss of baggage, personal effects, money and other inclusions are down to personal choice although please bear in mind that personal effects are more likely to go missing whilst travelling and you should ensure that your policy is adequate to cover the value of your personal effects e.g. cameras, tablets, phones etc. Please note that Imaginative Traveller and our partner operators are not responsible for your personal effects and are not insured for their loss.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should cover you for any activities that you may wish to participate in, such as white-water rafting, trekking, horse-riding, etc. and the 24-hour Emergency Assistance Company must be experienced in handling situations in developing countries if applicable (e.g. they have the ability to arrange repatriation from remote areas such as the Sahara or trekking in the Andes). If you are travelling to high altitude (such as embarking on a trek to the summit of Kilimanjaro), please make sure that this is also covered.

Please double check if you have annual travel and/or credit card policies to ensure they have the cover you require, as many of these policies are not suitable with adventure travel to remote areas. Many credit card medical insurance policies are not valid for travelling outside your country of residence or outside the EU.

Please also check the age limits on any policy you wish to take out and make sure that you thoroughly inform the insurance company of any pre-existing conditions.

Passports

Check that your passport will still be valid for 6 months after the end of the trip - this is important as some countries WILL refuse entry to anyone whose passport is due to expire. A temporary or emergency passport is not valid on our trips. You will need to provide us with your passport details prior to departing for your trip. If you change your passport please remember to inform us.

Pre and Post Trip Accommodation and Transfers

At Imaginative Traveller we believe you should make the most of the places you visit, so if you would like to see more of the joining or finishing point cities, why not book additional accommodation to extend your stay? We can take away the hassle of time zones and language barriers by making the booking for you. This accommodation is only available at the joining or finishing city of your trip, immediately before or after the trip you are travelling on. Please note our rates do not reflect last minute walk-in rates or internet specials.

We can also book arrival airport transfers for you as long as we have your flight arrival details. These are normally payable in cash upon arrival; however we do have pre paid transfers in a few destinations.

Please contact our reservations team for details of the accommodation and transfers that we can offer, as not all hotels offer this service.

Responsible Tourism

Imaginative Traveller is committed to ensuring that we have a positive impact on local communities and that we implement policies to minimise any negative impact on the local environment. We recognise that we are guests of local communities and strive to make them benefit directly from our visit. You can find full details of Imaginative Traveller's responsible tourism policy on our website.

Issues on the trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on

customer-relations@imtrav.net

You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip, but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

Feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! We rely on your feedback. We read it carefully. Feedback helps us to understand what we are doing well and what we could be doing better, and it allows us to make improvements for future travellers.