

**TRAIN : Golden Eagle Trans Siberian Express**

**JOURNEY : A Taste of the Silk Road (Moscow- Almaty)**

Journey Duration : More than 10 days

**INTRODUCTION**

Retracing one of the most vital trading routes of ancient civilisation, the Silk Road follows in the footprints of renowned figures like Alexander the Great and Marco Polo. For many centuries, tradesmen and explorers travelled to and from China on ancient routes through some of the most trying landscapes in the world trading silk, spices and perfumes. These ‘highways’ – stretching some 4,000 miles (6,400 km) – together came to be known as the ‘Silk Road’.

**Day to Day Itinerary**

**Day 1 : MOSCOW**

**RUSSIA**

Arrive at Moscow Airport, where you are met and transferred to the luxurious five-star Marriott Royal Aurora hotel (or similar) located in the heart of this vibrant city for a two-night stay. We enjoy a welcome dinner at our hotel, whilst you meet your fellow travellers and, together, look forward to the 13 day voyage that lies ahead.

(Please note there will be a main group of travellers on the tour that will travel from Moscow to Beijing as a 21 day journey).

**Day 2 : MOSCOW**

**RUSSIA**

Our touring programme of Moscow principally takes us to the grandeur of the Kremlin – the spiritual, historical and political heart of Moscow – and to see the treasures of the Tsars in the Armoury Chamber. We also visit Red Square, an iconic symbol of Russia’s former military and political might with its eclectic mix of fascinating architecture, such as the ornate St Basil’s Cathedral’s magnificent onion-domed spires, the beautiful facade of the world famous GUM department store, constructed in Tsarist times, and the sombre and evocative site of Lenin’s tomb.

With our *Freedom of Choice* touring option you may instead wish to travel out of the city centre to Sergiev Posad, home to one of the most beautiful monasteries in Russia and the historical and spiritual

centre of the Russian Orthodox Church or visit the famous State Tretyakov Gallery (National Museum of Fine Art).

Our *Golden Eagle* train, on selected departures, will be hauled by a Russian steam locomotive for the first/last section of the journey. With the opportunity to photograph the locomotive in Moscow Kazansky Station it makes for an unforgettable way to start, or end, your journey onboard Russia's premier train, the Golden Eagle. Included in our time spent in Moscow is one night at the five-star Marriott Royal Aurora, or similar. Located in Moscow city centre, and within walking distance of Red Square and the Bolshoi Theatre, this luxury hotel offers spacious accommodation with butler service for each guest room – the only hotel in Moscow to offer this fine service.

Why not extend your stay in Moscow with additional nights to explore more of the city at your leisure or have time to take in a performance at the world-renowned Bolshoi Theatre? *Tickets need to be pre-booked and are subject to schedule and availability.*

### **Day 3 : ONBOARD**

RUSSIA

In the morning of Day 3, we board the *Golden Eagle* Trans-Siberian Express at Moscow's Kazansky Station. After settling into our modern, stylish cabins, we enjoy dinner in one of the beautifully designed restaurant cars as our rail journey to Almaty in Kazakhstan begins.

### **Day 4 : VOLGOGRAD**

RUSSIA

Standing on the banks of the Volga, Stalingrad, as the city was known in Soviet times, was the dramatic scene of one of the most important Second World War battles. The Russians heroically turned back the Nazi advance here to alter the course of the war. We visit the poignantly sobering Mamayev Kurgan war memorial, followed by an informative museum visit.

### **Day 5 : KARA KUM**

KAZAKHSTAN

Today, we enjoy a relaxing day onboard as we travel across the vast expanses of the Kara Kum desert. As well as experiencing the unique landscape, we can take the opportunity to chat to fellow passengers and maybe take our first Russian language lesson.

**Day 6 : KHIVA**

UZBEKISTAN

From Urgench we travel to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia.

A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, we discover its impressive mosques, madrassas, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls.

**Day 7 : ASHGABAT**

TURKMENISTAN

Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan is known as the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum'. Situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, Ashgabat is a relatively modern city built upon the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala and the Soviet city built after the devastating earthquake of 1948.

The city's extravagant fountains, golden domes and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting. Highlights on our visit include a visit to the National Museum and Kipchak Mosque.

**Day 8 : MERV**

TURKMENISTAN

From Mary we transfer to the ancient and mainly unrestored remains of Merv. Once an important stopping point on the Silk Road, it claims to have briefly been the largest city in the world during the 12th Century.

1794 saw the demise of Merv, after the Emir of Bukhara destroyed the dam which the population depended on for its water.

### **Day 9 : BUKHARA**

#### UZBEKISTAN

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500th anniversary in 1999. The highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times.

We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named, Palace of the Moon and Stars. This evening, weather and time permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

### **Day 10 : SAMARKAND**

#### UZBEKISTAN

Just the mention of Samarkand instantly conjures up evocative images of the Silk Road, more so than any other town. Founded in the 6th Century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia and is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14th to the 17th Century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors.

Today we will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulag Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. Before dinner we will return to the now illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square.

### **Day 11 : TASHKENT**

#### UZBEKISTAN

Tashkent is the capital city of Uzbekistan and we spend time touring this modern Soviet-style city which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. Our tour of the city includes the Old Town, where traditional homes and religious buildings line the narrow streets and here in a small library we'll be privileged to see one of Islam's most sacred relics – the world's oldest Koran. This is followed by a visit to the Railway Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts.

**Day 12 : ALMATY**

KAZAKHSTAN

Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan and is notable for its wide tree-lined boulevards. Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shan Mountains, this beautifully verdant city derives its name from ‘alma’ meaning ‘apple’. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance.

Our city tour includes a visit to Panfilov Park where we have the opportunity to visit the Zenkhov Cathedral which was built entirely of wood. We’ll also go out of the city to the Chimbulak resort, where a cable car ride will give you spectacular views of Almaty and the mountains.

**Day 13 : ALMATY**

KAZAKHSTAN

After breakfast, transfer to the Almaty International Airport for your onward flight home.