

Russian History & Politics

Day 1 Departure From London / Arrive Moscow

Fly from London to Moscow. Moscow dates from 1147 and is now the political, economic and cultural center of Russia. On arrival your guide will take you to your transportation and head straight to the hotel.

Day 2 History Of Moscow and Moscow as a Capital

This morning's **City tour** will help you to get acquainted with Moscow – the capital of Russia. You will find out peculiar details about the history of this ancient city, as Moscow's origins have long been shrouded in the mystery of time; there are countless stories and myths about Moscow. You will see the unique historical, architectural and cultural landmarks: the Kremlin, the Cathedral of the Intercession on the Moat (which people renamed as the Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed), the Bolshoy Theatre, and visit inside the **Cathedral of Christ the Saviour** and climb to the viewing point on top. You'll feel the originality and the grandeur of Moscow – the centre of political, financial, cultural and spiritual life of Russia.

This afternoon after free time for lunch we tour **the Kremlin**, which is the historical centre of the city, the heart of Moscow. This is one of the most famous museums of the world, which continues to attract visitors in great numbers. Kremlin is located on a hill washed from one side by the Moscow-river. On the Kremlin grounds you can see the Tsar Bell and the Tsar Cannon and visit Annunciation (Blagoveschensky), Archangel (Arkhangelsky) and Assumption (Voznesensky) Cathedrals, the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great and the Church of the Twelve Apostles – the wonderful monuments of Russian church architecture with unique richly decorated interiors.

The world-famous **Armoury** is one of the oldest museums in Russia, a treasure house. It is the collection of Russian, Eastern, Western art works of the V–XX centuries, the tsar's thrones, garb and armour, the unique silver and golden dishes. The tsars and grand prince's regalia, the coaches of different centuries, the collection of arms. You will be told remarkable stories about the life of their owners. The Armoury as a depository of tsar's treasures was first mentioned in chronicles at the beginning of the 16th century. That was the prototype of the future museum. Nowadays the collection of the museum numbers over four thousand items.

Day 3 Moscow Of The 20th Century - Overnight Train

This morning we take a tour to the famous **Russian Cosmonauts Training Centre** named after Yuri Gagarin who did the first manned flight in space. On the grounds of the Centre there is a local museum and memorial office of Yuri Gagarin. During the tour you will visit the special technical zone of the Centre where there are unique simulators, the centrifuge, the hydro-lab with models of space vehicles. In a huge swimming pool (diameter 23 m, depth 19 m) there is a model of a space station. Water weightlessness enables cosmonauts to practice their skills necessary for their travelling into outer space. The astronavigation function simulating stand created at the cosmic planetarium gives the possibility to study the star sky and to define the orientation of manned spacecraft.

This afternoon we will visit the historical museum complex **Reserve Command Centre of the Supreme Commander-in-chief of Red Army I.V.Stalin** during The Second World War period starting from 1941 to 1945 in Izmailovo, commonly known as “**Stalin’s Bunker**”.

The creation of this object took place in the “thirties” of the last century. It was a part of the State programme and it had to provide a defensive capability for the country. At this time strategic aerodromes, railways, roads, bridges, factories, energy complexes were starting to be built. At the same time in Moscow a building of the subway system was started.

Hitler did not have proper information about the increase of military power in USSR thus made one of his fatal miscalculations in June of 1941, so we have to appreciate the regime of high confidentiality for this feat. Under the cover of this building project a huge bomb-shelter was created. At the same time the special underground building for military functions was creating command centres and communications a few times bigger by its size than the subway, so the military part of it was a total state secret. During the War there were about 2000 people working inside, but outside no one could see any one. “Stalin’s Unit” is: The Session Hall of the Supreme Command Chief of the Red Army; I.V.Stalin's work cabinet; I.V.Stalin's rest room; Dining room; Generals room (High command room); Rooms of the militant service and security.

Later we will ride on the **subway** and a walk along Arbat Street and Kalinin Prospekt will enable you to contrast old and new Moscow in close juxtaposition. After dinner, you will journey to St. Petersburg on the overnight train in comfortable couchettes.

Day 4 Creation & First Decades Of St. Petersburg

Peter the Great founded St. Petersburg in 1703. There are few cities that can match the grace and sheer poetry of St. Petersburg's cityscape. On our introductory **City Tour** you will become acquainted with the architecture, history and present day life of the former capital of Imperial Russia, the history of the Romanov dynasty. Among the rich parade of sights to be enjoyed will be Palace Square with the Winter Palace, the Square of Arts with the Russian Museum, the Smolny Convent, the famous Nevsky Avenue, St. Isaac's Cathedral, the famous statue of Peter the Great and the permanently moored Aurora cruiser, and many other architectural monuments, gorgeous palaces, marvellous bridges and picturesque embankments.

The Cabin of Peter I is a unique monument of Saint Petersburg's architecture. The cabin, which is the only wooden structure of the city foundation period that survived until nowadays, was constructed within a very short time - from 24 till 26 May, 1703. The cabin, made of hewn pine-tree logs and painted brick-like, was the first residence of Peter the Great in Saint Petersburg. Nowadays the exposition of the Cabin consists of Peter the Great epoch's objects, as well as personal belongings of Saint Petersburg's founder and his close associates. One of the most interesting exhibits in the museum is the plaster hand print of Peter the Great.

Peter and Paul Fortress is the first construction of Saint-Petersburg. By the order of Peter the Great it was built here to defend these lands from Sweden, during the war, which lasted 21 years. The first day of the fortress's construction – 27th of May 1703 – became the Birthday of the whole city. For a long period of time the fortress was used as a political prison. The architectural centre of the ensemble of the Fortress is the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. The Cathedral is a burial place of Russian Emperors from the time of Peter I. In 1998 the remains of the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II and his family were buried here.

Time permitting we will visit the **Kunstammer Museum** which has been the symbol of the Russian Academy of Sciences since the early 18th century. Founded to Peter the Great's Decree, the Museum opened to the public in 1714. Its purpose was to collect and examine natural and human curiosities and rarities. Today, collections of Peter the Great's Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography are among the most complete and interesting in the world. These collections contain over one million artifacts and reflect the diversity of traditional cultures in the Old and New World. The Museum has always been one of the world's largest centres where human cultural heritage is studied, continuing the traditions of the great Russian cultural and physical anthropologists of the 18 - 20th centuries.

Day 5 Imperial St. Petersburg

Our day will begin at the **Hermitage**, one of the largest museums in the world after Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London. The Hermitage collection numbers over 3 million exhibits from prehistoric to modern times. The Russian Empress Catherine II founded it in 1764, when she bought a large number of Western European paintings. To house the collection she ordered a new building to be constructed. Now the permanent museum display occupies five buildings (The Winter Palace, The Small Hermitage, The Old Hermitage, The New Hermitage and the Hermitage Theatre), which form a brilliant architectural ensemble. The remarkable architects and sculptors of 18th – 19th centuries decorated the museum's interiors. A number of staterooms, where official ceremonies used to be held, preserve their sumptuous décor.

The Hermitage acquires authentic masterpieces by the greatest painters and sculptors of the World, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, El Greco, Claude Monet, August Renoir, Paul Cezanne, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso and Matisse.

This afternoon we visit **Yussupov Palace**, one of the most sumptuous palaces in Saint–Petersburg. It's one of the rare works of architecture whose history is closely associated with the names of the aristocracy, eminent architects, artists of the 19th and early 20th century. It belonged to the fabulously rich Yussupov family. The palace is also famed as the scene of Rasputin's murder in December 1916.

Later you will take the opportunity for some shopping when you walk along the **Nevsky Prospekt**. This is St. Petersburg's oldest and most beautiful street where shops and cafes intermingle with splendid historic buildings.

Alternatively you can visit the suburb **Tsarskoe Selo** (Royal Village) located 25 km south of St. Petersburg, which first appeared in the 18C as the summer residence of the Russian tsars and were evocative of the rosy days and the grey days of the Romanovs. In 1937 the name was changed into Pushkin, to commemorate the centenary of the great Russian poet's tragic death.

The summer palaces were created for Empress Elizabeth and Catherine the Great and you will visit the remarkable Baroque **Catherine Palace**, built by architect Rastrelli between 1752-1756, and numerous entertainment pavilions were erected in the park.

This evening you can go to a **Folk show** (Optional) at the Nikolaevsky Palace to see Russian folkloric dances and music.

Day 6 Revolutionary Russia & Soviet Russia

The State Museum of the Political History of Russia is a successor of the State Museum of Revolution which was created in 1919. Among the initiators of the Museum foundation there were prominent figures of the Bolshevik Party and narodnik movement (populism), and representatives of intelligentsia.

The State Museum of Revolution was the first museum in the country which was engaged in historical and revolutionary problems. By the mid-1920s it had a unique collection of revolutionary banners, an extremely valuable gathering of leaflets of different political parties, posters, and objects of that time. The museum collection illustrates the heroic and tragic history of the country for the period of more than 200 years, and it certainly is one of the most interesting collections dealing with the problems of state structure history, public movements, political life of Russia in the 19th-20th centuries. During the last decades the museum has turned into a unique Museum of Political History of Russia. Relics concerning the Soviet period and modern history of Russia, materials telling about the centennial history of Russian Parliamentarism and activities of modern political parties have become part of the collection.

The historical ship **Aurora** has been turned into a museum and is docked just a few hundred yards upstream from the Cabin of Peter the Great. The cruiser, built in St. Petersburg between 1897 and 1900, took an active part in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and participated in the Tsushima battle, in which most of Russia's Pacific fleet was destroyed. After the war the ship was used for personnel training and during the October revolution of 1917 gave the signal (by firing a blank shot) to storm of the Winter Palace.

The historic ship **Krasin**, moored off the southern bank of Vasilyevsky Island, is one of the more recent additions to St. Petersburg's museum scene. Despite its age, the "Krasin" is still in good working order and eminently seaworthy, but after undergoing extensive restoration work it has now become a floating museum. During WWII the "Krasin" led Allied convoys, which brought strategic supplies, arms and ammunition to the Soviet Union. The convoys fought their way to the northern Soviet seaports, despite heavy Nazi bombardment and the constant threat of submarine attacks. The museum displays some of the ship's equipment and details its participation in various rescue operations, convoys and research expeditions.

This small but extremely moving **Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad** commemorates perhaps the most harrowing period of the city's history - the 900-day Blockade of Leningrad which lasted from 8 September 1941 to 17 January 1944. For two-and-a-half years, the citizens of Leningrad suffered chronic privations and constant bombardment. Over 700,000 civilians died during the Blockade.

The main exhibition chronicles both the military and the civilian aspects of the blockade. The displays running round the walls tell the story of the advance of the combined German and Finnish forces and their eventual repulsion by the Red Army through photographs, arms and the personal effects of soldiers of all nationalities. The central displays document the even more harrowing civilian experience of the Blockade, and include a wealth of fascinating propaganda material, a mock-up of a typical apartment interior of the time, an example of the pitiful daily bread ration (125 grams for a civil servant and his family), and numerous handwritten and drawn testaments to the privations and horrors of life under siege.

We will also visit the **Piskaryovskoye Cemetery**, an impressive memorial to the 1941-43 siege of Leningrad during World War Two.

Day 7 The Siege of Leningrad

This full-day tour tells the tale of the most tragic Siege of the twentieth century according to the most recent research and declassified Soviet data, treading carefully between Soviet era propaganda and sensationalist anti-Soviet myths.

The tour starts with driving along the **Road of Life** - the only supply route to the besieged city along which dozens of trains and trucks shuttled constantly from the lake coast to the city's supply depots. The bus will stop by a cemetery where the victims of war are buried and two memorials built in the 60s to commemorate the vital role the road played in saving Leningrad from starvation.

The first big stop of the tour is the **Road of Life Museum** which displays wartime relics telling of the heroic feat of the truck drivers that braved the lake's frozen expanses under fire of enemy bombers and artillery. Next to the museum building there is an exhibition of military and transport vehicles complete with an airplane that delivered food supplies to the city.

On the way to Kirovsk the bus will stop at the coast of Ladoga lake in Morozova, where you'll get a good view of the **Oreshek fortress**. Located on a tiny island at the very source of Neva river, it was heroically defended by the Soviet troops throughout the whole Siege.

Nevsky Bridgehead, a tiny patch of land about 3 square kilometers wide became a common grave for almost 50 000 Soviet soldiers, making it one of the bloodiest battlefields of the Second World War. A network of trenches you'll be able to walk alongside is still clearly visible to date. Several memorials and a church were built on the site.

The **Diorama museum** is located underneath a big bridge across the Neva river, on exactly the same place where the German fortifications and trenches along the river were successfully stormed by the Soviet infantry on January 12, 1943, opening the six-day offensive that broke the Siege. The diorama depicts the most crucial events that took place that day on an impressive 40 x 8 meter canvas. Several Soviet tanks that sank during the river crossing are standing in front of the museum's entrance.

The bus will drive you back to the city along the Murmansk highway that passes across little villages, forests and collective farm fields.

Day 8 Flight To London

Your enjoyable and rewarding tour will come to an end as your guide accompanies you to the airport for the return flight to London.