TUVA & LAKE BAI KAL
ABAKAN, SHUSHENSKOYE, KYZYL, IRKUTSK, LI STVYANKA, OLKHON ISLAND
July 10-22, 2017
TRIP ITINERARY

Journey into South Siberia and the remote republics of the Russian Federation to discover a fascinating cultural heritage and unexpected natural beauty. The Tuvan people of the region are similar to the Mongols, and many of the historically semi-nomadic population still tend herds of yaks, goats, sheep, cows, and reindeer. See the ancient burial mounds of Khakassia; explore Shushenskoye, where Lenin was exiled; attend a shaman ceremony; and visit Siberian families in their homes. Listen to the eerie sounds of Tuvan throat-singing and enjoy a concert of chimes by a master bell ringer at an Orthodox church in Irkutsk. At Lake Baikal, the oldest and deepest lake in the world, travel by hydrofoil and 4x4 vehicles during your exploration of Olkhon Island.

GROUP SIZE: Up to 25 guests

PRICING: Double occupancy: $7,995 / Single supplement: $695

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STUDY LEADER:

NINA TUMARKIN. Professor of History and Director of Russian Area Studies at Wellesley College, is a longtime Associate of Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. President Bill Clinton read her book on World War II in Russian memory and myth, The Living and the Dead, in preparation for his Victory Day visit to Moscow in May 1995. Nina is also the author of Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia. At Wellesley College, where she has taught since 1975 (after receiving her PhD from Harvard the same year), Nina teaches courses in all periods of Russia’s dramatic history—Medieval, Imperial, and Soviet—as well as Modern European history. She has lectured on alumni cruises in Russia, East Europe, the Dalmatian coast, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea.
SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner, R=Reception

MONDAY, JULY 10
DEPART U.S.
Depart USA on international flights bound for Moscow.

TUESDAY, JULY 11
ARRIVE MOSCOW, CONNECT TO ABAKAN
Arrive in Moscow and connect to an evening flight to Abakan, the capital of Khakassia, a small republic within the Russian Federation located in southwest Siberia.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12
ARRIVE ABAKAN
Flights from Moscow arrive in Abakan early this morning. Transfer to the hotel for an early check-in and breakfast. The remainder of the morning is free to rest.

After lunch, set out on an afternoon tour of Abakan. The Khakassia region has been inhabited since the Stone Age. There are thousands of ancient archaeological sites here, including Scythian grave mounds, called kurgans, dating from the 5th century BC. (The Scyths were nomads and mounted warriors who dominated the Eurasian steppes, disappearing in the early years of Christianity).

Today a town of about 200,000, Abakan is the most important city in the region, rich in natural resources and beauty.

Overnight: Hotel Anzas (or similar) / (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, JULY 13
ABAKAN / SHUSHENSKOYE
After breakfast, depart for Minusinsk, a regional agricultural and trade center. Walk around the city center, admiring the old merchant houses and making a stop at the local market for a chance to purchase some of the fabled Minusinsk heirloom tomatoes.

Continue to Shushenskoe, an obscure Siberian village on the Yenisei River, known mainly because Lenin was exiled there. Along the way enjoy views of the Sayano-Shushenskoye Hydroelectric Dam, which was built in 1987 and formed a large reservoir that is now a protected biosphere reserve. Also visit a trout farm near the dam where they sell fresh fish.

Upon arrival in Shushenskoye, visit the State Ethnographic Museum, a unique open-air complex that re-creates a traditional Siberian village of the 19th century. Founded in 1970, the museum is based on the two memorial houses where Lenin had lived in exile. Siberian peasants' occupations and living conditions the late 19th and early 20th centuries have been recreated in the houses and farmsteads located here: hunting, fishing, tanning, wicker-working, weaving, barrel-making, traditional footwear, wheels, carts, and sledges are on display. Most of the buildings and items of the museum's collections are authentic products of traditional Siberian culture.

Enjoy dinner tonight in Shushenskoye.

Overnight: Shushenskoye Guesthouse (or similar) / (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, JULY 14
SHUSHENKOYE / KYZYL
Following breakfast, set off for Turan, located in a region known locally as the “Valley of the Czars” for the number and richness of the kurgans located here. Tour the Valley of the Czars, visiting some of the excavated sites.

Inspect the Arzhan II archaeological site, a kurgan near Turan where a 2001 expedition found 44 pounds of Scythian gold—5,700 pieces of beautifully designed ornaments for clothing, shields, and equestrian armor. While in Turan, visit the Museum of Russian Colonists to learn about the first Russians who moved into this area.

In the afternoon continue the journey across the West Sayan Mountains, arriving in Kyzyl in time for dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Odugen (or similar) / (B, L, D)
SATURDAY, JULY 15
KYZYL / SAMAGALTAI

Today visit Samagaltai, the former capital of Tuva. The drive from Kyzyl is about three hours through the remote Tuvan countryside. Stop en route at a mountain pass where you are joined by a local throat singer for a short Buddhist ceremony.

Upon arrival to Samagaltai, visit a nomadic family and take some time to learn about their way of life. Observe the art of making Tuvan cheese and try your hand at horseback riding or enjoy a private throat-singing lesson.

Meet with a local shaman for a demonstration of an authentic ceremony. Shamans intercede for people with the spirit world, the unseen world that pervades the Tuvan environment. Shamanism was deliberately suppressed by the Soviets, and Tuvans who discovered they had shamanic abilities were forced to hide them from anyone except close relatives. Since 1991, shamanism in Tuva has experienced resurgence.

Return to Kyzyl in the evening before dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Odugen (or similar) / (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, JULY 16
KYZYL

Kyzyl, the capital of Tuva, is a little Soviet-style city where ethnic Tuvans and Russians live side by side.

This morning pay a visit to a Buddhist temple and meet with a local monk. Next, observe a soapstone carver in his studio and learn about this ancient art. Finally, meet a Tuvan stamp collector. During Tuva’s short period as an independent country, the government issued stamps that have become rare collector’s items today.

After lunch, continue to the Tuvan National Museum of Regional Studies. The museum contains artifacts explaining the Tuvan peoples’ history and culture. Some of the Scythian discoveries from the kurgans of the Valley of the Czars, originally sent to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, have been returned and are found here as well.

Browse the Kyzyl Expo, where concession stands sell all kinds of produce and local products.

This evening enjoy a dinner of traditional dishes accompanied by a performance of Tuvan throat singing.

Overnight: Hotel Odugen (or similar) / (B, L, D)

MONDAY, JULY 17
KYZYL / IRKUTSK

Transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Irkutsk. Founded in 1661 as a Cossack garrison and fortress, Irkutsk developed into an important way station for expeditions and trade caravans. After a devastating fire in 1879, the city was rebuilt in the neoclassical style.

Upon arrival in Irkutsk, transfer to the hotel for check-in, followed by lunch and a city tour. This afternoon, visit the Decembrists Museum. The Decembrists were a group of officers who served abroad during the War of 1812 and became advocates of democratic reform. In December 1825, they tried to force the Senate to abolish serfdom and institute these reforms. Their rebellion was quickly put down, and five of the leaders were hanged. The rest were sentenced to forced labor, and many of them settled in Irkutsk after their terms were over. They brought with them education and culture.

Enjoy a private concert inside the museum.

After dinner, spend the evening at leisure to relax before the hydrofoil journey to Olkhon Island tomorrow.

Overnight: Marriott Courtyard Hotel (or similar) / (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, JULY 18
IRKUTSK / OLKHON ISLAND

Take an early morning transfer to the port to catch the hydrofoil to Olkhon Island.

Olkhon Island is in a peculiar rain shadow and has more sunny days than the Black Sea coast. The northern half is covered in pine, fir, and larch, and the southern half is hilly steppe and sand dunes. The Baikal waves breaking on the sandy shores of Olkhon’s western side and...
the rocky crags in the east combine to make it a national treasure. The island and its flora and fauna have been protected as a part of Pribaikalsky National Park since 1986.

Upon arrival on Olkhon in the late afternoon, transfer to the local hotel for check-in and dinner.

Overnight: Baikal View Hotel (or similar) / (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19
OLKHON ISLAND

Set out this morning on 4x4s to visit Khoboi Cape, a sharp and narrow outcropping whose name means “tusk” or “fang.”

Stop for a picnic lunch in a scenic setting.
Later join a local shaman for a ceremony and pay a visit to the Nature and History Museum in Khuzhir Village. Founded by the former school principal about 40 years ago, its displays include costumes and household items used by island people in years past.

Return to hotel this evening in time for dinner.

Overnight: Baikal View Hotel (or similar) / (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, JULY 20
OLKHON ISLAND / IRKUTSK

Following breakfast, depart Olkhon and travel overland to Irkutsk. Stop en route in the town of Ust-Orda, the capital of the Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomous District. The indigenous Buryats make up over a third of the mostly rural population here. The land, encompassing the Lena-Angara Plateau, is a mix of taiga and steppe, and a rich agricultural and cattle-breeding area.

Upon arrival in Irkutsk, enjoy a free evening to rest or explore on your own. Dinner tonight is independent.

Overnight: Marriott Courtyard Hotel (or similar) / (B, L)

FRIDAY, JULY 21
IRKUTSK / LISTVYANKA

Begin the day with a climb to the top of the bell tower of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to enjoy a concert of chimes by a master bell ringer.

Later drive to the village of Listvyanka, on the shores of Lake Baikal, approximately an hour outside of Irkutsk.

En route, stop at the Museum of Wooden Architecture, a 166-acre outdoor museum displaying authentic Russian and native Buryat, Evenki, and Tafalar houses and community buildings. The structures were moved here from various Siberian locations, furnished with period appointments, and assembled into little hamlets and nomadic camps that demonstrate how people lived.

Listvyanka began as a fishing outpost and has become a center for the study of Lake Baikal. Have lunch upon arrival, and then tour the village.

Visit the Baikal Limnological Museum to learn about the origin of the lake and its characteristics as the oldest and deepest lake in the world. Lake Baikal is home to some unique species, like the golomyanka, a transparent fish, the omul, a tasty salmon-like fish, and the freshwater seal, the nerpa. An aquarium near the museum is home to a pair of these seals.

Next, stop at Saint Nicholas Church, built in the 19th century by a Russian merchant.

This evening, back in Irkutsk, gather for a festive farewell dinner to toast the end of a wonderful journey.

Overnight: Marriott Courtyard Hotel (or similar) / (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, JULY 22
DEPART IRKUTSK

The tour concludes today with transfers to the airport for international departures. / (B)