



**The Caspian Odyssey by Private Train
From the South Caucasus to Central Asia
2020**



The Caspian Odyssey by Private Train

From the South Caucasus to Central Asia

Aboard the *Golden Eagle* private train

One eastbound departure in 2020 – Private Rail Journey – 16 Days

September 24-October 9, 2020

Board the luxury Golden Eagle private train for an exploration of the countries on both the western and the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. With their important places in history at the crossroads of trade, religion, language, and the arts, these countries host fascinating modern cultures, as well as some of the earth's most ancient and ageless architecture. Begin in Yerevan, capital of Armenia, one of the three South Caucasus countries clustered together on a mountainous strip of land between the Black and the Caspian Seas. Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are fabulously rich sources of ancient artifacts, stunning mountain backdrops and a strong code of hospitality. Visit their capital cities and discover their craggy mountains, fertile valleys and sweeping vistas from the windows of the luxury Golden Eagle.

Fly over the oil-rich Caspian Sea to visit Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat. Then head down the tracks to Uzbekistan's Silk Road oases, UNESCO-listed Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. End in Almaty, Kazakhstan's most prosperous city.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Thursday, September 24	Arrive Yerevan, Armenia
Day 2, Friday, September 25	Yerevan • board the <i>Golden Eagle</i> private train
Day 3, Saturday, September 26	Lake Sevan • Dilijan
Day 4, Sunday, September 27	Tbilisi, Georgia
Day 5, Monday, September 28	Tbilisi • Telavi
Day 6, Tuesday, September 29	Gori • Uplistsikhe • Mtskheta
Day 7, Wednesday, September 30	Baku, Azerbaijan
Day 8, Thursday, October 1	Baku
Day 9, Friday, October 2	Baku • fly to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Day 10, Saturday, October 3	Onboard • Darvaza Gas Crater
Day 11, Sunday, October 4	Khiva, Uzbekistan
Day 12, Monday, October 5	Bukhara
Day 13, Tuesday, October 6	Samarkand
Day 14, Wednesday, October 7	Tashkent
Day 15, Thursday, October 8	Almaty, Kazakhstan
Day 16, Friday, October 9	Depart Almaty



Tour Features

- Enjoy the comfort and efficiency of your own private en suite cabin on the *Golden Eagle* luxury train.
- Survey a series of fascinating cities along the rail line.
- Join travelers from around the world to enjoy the casual and relaxed atmosphere aboard the private train, dining in luxury and chatting over drinks in the lounge.
- Relax deeply as you are carried into another land, a world away from home.

Tour Highlights

Yerevan Armenian Countryside	Capital of Armenia, the Cascade, Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art Temple of Garni, Monastery of Geghard (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lake Sevan, Dilijan
Tbilisi	Views of Narikala Fortress and Mother Georgia Monument, Anchiskhati Basilica, Sioni Cathedral with the Cross of St. Nino, Metekhi Church of the Virgin, Rustaveli Avenue and Old Town, Simon Janashia Museum
Kakheti Region Georgian Countryside	Telavi, Tsinindali Village, Estate of Alexander Chavchavadze Gori, Uplistsikhe Cave Town, “Historical Monuments of Mtskheta” (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Baku	Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah’s Palace and Maiden Tower (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Fountain Square, Martyr’s Lane
Gobustan	Important site of ancient petroglyphs (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Ashgabat	Capital of Turkmenistan, flamboyant gilded architecture
Turkmen Countryside	Darvaza Gas Crater, Kara Kum Desert
Khiva	City walls, Old Town, or Ichon Kala (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Bukhara	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ark Citadel, Palace of Moon and Stars
Samarkand	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan Square, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Ulug Bek Observatory
Tashkent	Capital of Uzbekistan, Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theater, Indepen- dence Square
Almaty	Kazakhstan’s largest city, Panfilov Park



Itinerary

Day One, Thursday, September 24

Arrive Yerevan, Armenia

Passengers are met and transferred to the centrally located hotel. Meet fellow passengers at a **welcome reception and dinner** this evening.

Meals: D – *Marriott Yerevan or similar*

Day Two, Friday, September 25

Yerevan • board the *Golden Eagle Private Train*

The capital city of Armenia is older even than Rome.

Yerevan was founded under the name Erebuni in 782 BC. Christianity has been crucial to the development of a sense of identity and pride in Armenia. In 310 AD, Armenia's King Trdat III converted to the new creed and adopted it as the state religion, making Armenia the first Christian country. Since that time, Armenia has been firmly Christian, a fact which has greatly affected its history.

The city center today includes a wide range of architectural styles as a result of the fusion of Armenian and Russian design. The layout of the city features a large central square with broad avenues radiating from it, and a ring of parkland. Mountains surround the city, including the snow-covered peaks of Ararat to the south and the four peaks of Mount Aragats to the northwest.

Begin touring by driving outside the city to admire Geghard Monastery. Carved into the side of a mountain, **UNESCO-listed Geghard Monastery** is one of the most fascinating monuments in Armenia. Beside the river at the foot of the rock, the church dates from 1215. It provides access to another building that has a roof formed by stalactites. The convent is in a cave adjoining this building; the only way in is through a narrow opening in the roof.

Visit the **Temple of Garni**, which stands on a cliff near the Azat River valley. With walls of huge basalt blocks, the temple was once the summer palace of King Trdat I, who built it in the first century AD. Destroyed by an earthquake in 1679, the monument has been restored by Armenian architects in recent years, and skilled work continues on the third century royal baths and their striking mosaics.



Back in Yerevan, visit **the Cascade**, a massive white staircase with waterfalls set into a downtown Yerevan hillside. The Cascade is becoming a meeting place and icon of the city. Located within the Cascade, the exciting **Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art** is built on the extensive collection of Gerard Cafesjian. It focuses on sculpture, glass and paintings from contemporary artists.

This evening, board the luxury *Golden Eagle* private train for overnight. The train departs the station late tonight, or in the early hours of Day Three.

Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Golden Eagle private train*

Day Three, Saturday, September 26

Lake Sevan • Dilijan

Today the train takes the scenic route around **Lake Sevan**. Blue-green Lake Sevan, at over 6,200 feet, is one of the largest alpine lakes in the world. Filling two inter-mountain depressions, the brilliant lake is a favorite resort for citizens of Yerevan, about 45 miles away. In 1930, a Soviet plan to use lake water for hydroelectricity and irrigation caused the water level to sink rapidly, and beaches and resorts to appear on the new lake shore.

Continue to the small mountain resort of **Dilijan** and transfer to a coach for the rest of today's touring. Set in Dilijan National Park in the northern Armenian province of Tavush, Dilijan is renowned as a place frequented by artists, composer and filmmakers. Its cobbled Sharambeyan Street has been refurbished and preserved as an example of early Dilijan, lined with craftsmen's workshops, typical stone houses, a gallery and a historical museum.

Enjoy an **Armenian cognac reception and lunch** at Avan Dzoraget Hotel on the Debed River. Return to the train this evening for dinner and overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Golden Eagle private train



Day Four, Sunday September 27

Tbilisi, Georgia

Wake up in Georgia's capital, **Tbilisi**, today. Georgia's strip of central lowlands has long been an important link between East and West. Tbilisi is set at the mouth of this passageway, in the Mtkvari River valley, and has changed hands many times. Most notably, the city was ruled by the Arabs for 400 years before King David the Builder defeated them in 1121 and moved his capital here from Kutaisi. The Georgian king fostered tolerance for Tbilisi's Arab population, and the city still has a multiethnic atmosphere.

The red-roofed Old Town, its houses sporting carved wooden balconies, sits beneath the Narikala Fortress on the hill above. Tbilisi was last razed in 1795 by Aga Khan, and most of the current buildings date from that time. The domed sulfur baths and the stone Anchiskhati Church were all that survived from earlier times.

The Tbilisi touring includes **views of the Narikala Fortress**, the 4th century citadel built to keep watch over the narrowest point on the Kura River. The hike to the fortress may be undertaken if time permits, but if

not, the view from **Metekhi Church of the Virgin** is perfect. Also visible from many vantage points within today's tour is **Mother Georgia**, a soaring monument above the city bearing a sword for her enemies and a bowl of wine for her guests.

Visit the 6th century stone **Anchiskhati Basilica**, the city's oldest church. Pause at **Sioni Cathedral**, sheltering the Cross of St. Nino, the woman who brought Christianity to Georgia, and pass by the 19th century caravanserai built to house traveling merchants. Tour the 13th century Metekhi Church of the Virgin, constructed on an outcropping above the river on the site of David the Builder's former palace. Wander **Rustaveli Avenue**, the main street of Tbilisi. Notice the numerous elaborately carved wooden balconies attached to the houses in the Old Town, a feature of the city's architectural landscape that often appears in paintings.



Tour the former National Museum, now called the **Simon Janashia Museum**, whose mission statement is to preserve Georgian heritage; much of what can be seen here is important to humanity at large as well as to Georgia. Visitors can see one of the largest collections of ancient gold decorative arts as well as very well preserved medieval cloisonné. The most famous exhibit here, though, is the 1.7 million year old hominid skulls found in Dmanisi, Georgia.

Return to the train for overnight (train remains at the Central Station overnight).

Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Golden Eagle private train*

Day Five, Monday, September 28

Tbilisi • Telavi



Board a coach this morning and continue the exploration of Georgia in **Kakheti, Georgia's wine country**. Georgians were originally sun worshippers and believed that the sun's chosen plant was the grape vine. St. Nino, who brought Christianity to Georgia, was said to have made a cross of grape vines and bound it together with her hair, symbolizing the sun's rays. The winding characters of the Georgian alphabet resemble the trailing growth of the vine, and this motif is found in Georgian architecture throughout the country. The Kakheti region is the most important wine-growing area of the country.

Telavi, a town of some 20,000, is the administrative and cultural center of Kakheti. The

town has been in existence from at least the 1st century, when it was a stop on one of the trade routes from the Middle East to Europe.

Discover the nearby village of **Tsinandali**, best known for the **family estate of Alexander Chavchavadze**, located near here. A 19th century Georgian aristocrat and poet, Chavchavadze managed to serve admirably in the Imperial Russian army during the times he wasn't fighting Russia for Georgian independence. His estate was a center of the intellectual life of the time. Here he and his father founded the first and foremost winery in the country, which still produces the dry white Tsinindali wine. His mansion has been transformed into a museum in honor of the poet and hero.

Return to the train for overnight (arrival in Gori will be late tonight or early morning on Day Six, and train will remain stationary on arrival).

Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Golden Eagle private train*

Day Six, Tuesday, September 29

Gori • Uplistsikhe • Mtskheta

Awaken in **Gori** today, where you transfer to the coach for touring. Once the stronghold of Georgian kings, Gori is now better known for its connection with Stalin, who was born here in December 1879 and lived here until 1883. Stalin's father was a local shoemaker named Vissarion Dzhughashvili. Their original wooden hut, located on Stalin Prospekt, is today the **Stalin House Museum**. Also on the



grounds of the museum is **Stalin's private railway car** in which he traveled throughout the Soviet Union.

Stop at the nearby cave town of **Uplistsikhe (Lord's Castle)**, which was once one of the most important stops along the trade route that linked Byzantium with India and China. Bordered by the Mtkvari River and spanning 22 acres of mountainside, Uplistsikhe was an entire town carved into the soft stone of the mountainside. The ultimate decline of the city can be attributed to the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, but the remains are still a fascinating site to visit. Here, enjoy a **private concert of traditional Georgian polyphonic vocal music**.



photo: James Carnehan

Return to Gori to board the train, and ride to **UNESCO-listed Mtskheta**, the capital of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Iberia from the 3rd century BC until the 5th century AD. Because of its location on the rivers, it was an important market town. As the center of the Iberian civilization, Mtskheta was also significant spiritually and culturally. Georgia's conversion to Christianity took place here in 337 AD. The Orthodox churches built during this period – **Svetitskhoveli Cathedral**, its interior decorated in murals, and **Jvari**, one of the first Christian churches in Georgia – are considered among the finest. After touring here, return to Tbilisi by coach and re-board the train for the overnight ride to Baku. Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Golden Eagle private train*

Day Seven, Wednesday, September 30 Baku, Azerbaijan

Today the train pulls into **Baku**, Azerbaijan's capital. Parts of Azerbaijan, notably Gobustan, below Baku on the Caspian coast, show evidence of human habitation beginning in the Stone Age. Flaming natural gas vents on the Absheron Peninsula, where Baku is now located, may have inspired Zarathustra, a local resident around 1000 BC, to include fire rituals in his Zoroastrian religion. Baku was first mentioned in the 9th century, when its people were reported to burn oil that came from the ground in their lamps.

Baku's inhabitants stayed behind the 14th century walls of their town almost until the 19th century, when the Russian empire began exploiting in earnest the great oil reserves under the waters of the Caspian. An oil boom that lasted from 1880 to 1915 left a region of Beaux Arts mansions built by the newly-rich.

Baku's **UNESCO-listed Old Town**, or Icheri Sheher, was once the whole city, and is the best place to picture its history. It is completely encircled by the old city walls with their medieval gates. The winding streets and alleyways are home to private residences, mosques and *madrassahs*, carpet merchants and tiny shops. The aura of the past that permeates the town rewards exploration and careful investigation with surprising glimpses of a bygone era.

Check into a leading **hotel** for a two-night stay while the train is loaded onto the Caspian Sea ferry for the crossing to Central Asia.

Meals: B, L, D – *Baku Hilton or similar*





Day Eight, Thursday, October 1

Baku

This morning head down onto the Absheron Peninsula to explore **Gobustan**, an important site of ancient petroglyphs, added to the **UNESCO World Heritage list** in 2007. Quarry workers discovered the rock carvings here by accident in the 1930s. Since then, the carvings depicting men, women, animals and artifacts have been the focus of much study and speculation. The record left by these ancient people attests to a far vaster Caspian Sea, and gives insight into details of daily life such as hunting and recreation, culture and economy. An excellent modern museum adds to the

experience. Enjoy lunch overlooking the Caspian Sea and return to the city in the afternoon.

Enjoy free time this afternoon, before dinner at a traditional local restaurant and overnight at the hotel. Meanwhile on Days Seven and Eight, the *Golden Eagle* train will be making its way across the Caspian to Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat. It is possible for adventurous travelers to ride aboard the train ferry, with its limited passenger facilities, and basic cabins and catering. Please inquire for costs and details, as this option has to be selected at the time of booking.

Meals: B, L, D – *Baku Hilton or similar*

Day Nine, Friday, October 2

Baku • fly to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

This morning after breakfast, depart for the Baku airport and catch a flight to **Ashgabat**, Turkmenistan's capital. This morning, set out on a city tour of Ashgabat. In spite of its location on a trade route, Ashgabat never achieved the status and influence of other Silk Road cities like Khiva or Bukhara. In 1881 the Russians built a fortress on the site as a buffer against English-dominated Persia, and by the early 20th century Ashgabat was a prosperous and flourishing city. In 1948 a massive earthquake leveled the city, killing over two-thirds of the population. Recently Ashgabat has seen a boom in new construction, which has had a major impact on the look of the city. New marble and gold monuments have sprung up all over town. In fact, in 2013, the Guinness Book of World Records awarded Ashgabat the record for the highest density of white marble buildings in the world.

The **National Museum of Turkmenistan**, with its grand approach and panoramic views, introduces modern Turkmenistan on the ground floor and ancient history in the galleries above. The historical exhibits begin with artifacts ranging from stone-age tools to carved ivory drinking horns used for Zoroastrian rituals and special occasions (called rhytons), and move through time, telling the story of Turkmenistan through the ages. Other galleries display beautiful ceramics, coins, amulets, and



gold and silver artifacts. The museum also features a fantastic selection of Turkmen carpets located on the ground floor.

Touring also includes **Kipchak Mosque**. The huge \$100-million-dollar mosque in former Turkmen President Niyazov's hometown of Kipchak was inaugurated in 2004. The mosque is big enough to hold 10,000 people, and its 164-foot golden dome had to be lowered in place by helicopter. Verses from Niyazov's own spiritual book, the *Ruhnama*, are etched on the walls alongside Koranic verses. Niyazov was buried here in the family mausoleum that he built, along with the mosque, with government funds.

Please note, today's schedule will be heavily dependent on flight times from Baku to Ashgabat, and there may be the opportunity for additional touring in either city, or time left free for independent exploration. In all cases, spend the night in a **luxury Ashgabat hotel** before beginning the official touring tomorrow. Meals: B, L, D – *Oguzkent or similar*



*Day Ten, Saturday,
October 3*
**Onboard • Darvaza Gas
Crater**

Depart Ashgabat today and re-board the train, setting off towards the Uzbek border. Take the opportunity this evening to leave the train for a nighttime excursion to the **Darvaza Gas Crater**. Darvaza is a tiny town of about 350 semi-nomadic Teke tribal people just outside the “**Door to Hell**,” one of Turkmenistan's most unusual sights. Located about 160 miles north of Ashgabat in the

Kara Kum Desert, Darvaza was a site of natural gas exploration in the 1970s. The story goes that the drilling equipment was swallowed up by a huge sinkhole filled with gas. Engineers decided to burn off the gas to make the cavern safe for more drilling. It has been burning ever since, and blazes with an incredible strength that's visible from miles away. Re-board the train for overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Golden Eagle private train*

Day Eleven, Sunday, October 4
Khiva, Uzbekistan

Make a stop today in Khiva. Legend says that the ancient Silk Road oasis of **Khiva** was founded at the place where Shem, son of Noah, discovered water in the desert, and that the city got its name from Shem's joyful shout, “Hey va!” at the discovery. Today the living city is part museum town, part re-creation of life hundreds of years ago.





A walking tour in Khiva includes the monuments of the **UNESCO-listed Old Town**, or Ichon Qala, including the **Tash-Hauli Palace**, or Stone House, built in the 19th century for the reigning khan and his four wives; the **Dzhuma Mosque** with its interior forest of carved wooden pillars; and the **Kunya Ark**, the original residence of the khans, partially destroyed in the Persian invasion of the 18th century.
Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Golden Eagle private train

Day Twelve, Monday, October 5

Bukhara

Uzbekistan's best-preserved oasis city, Bukhara, is next. **UNESCO-listed Bukhara** offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the camel caravans that plied the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. The Old Town in Bukhara has a unified feel, drawn together by a central reflecting pool and plaza, by commonality in the structure of the domed bazaars and by the major monuments ringing the old town. Explore the 2,000-year-old **Ark Citadel** and the emir's **Palace of the Moon and Stars**.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Golden Eagle private train

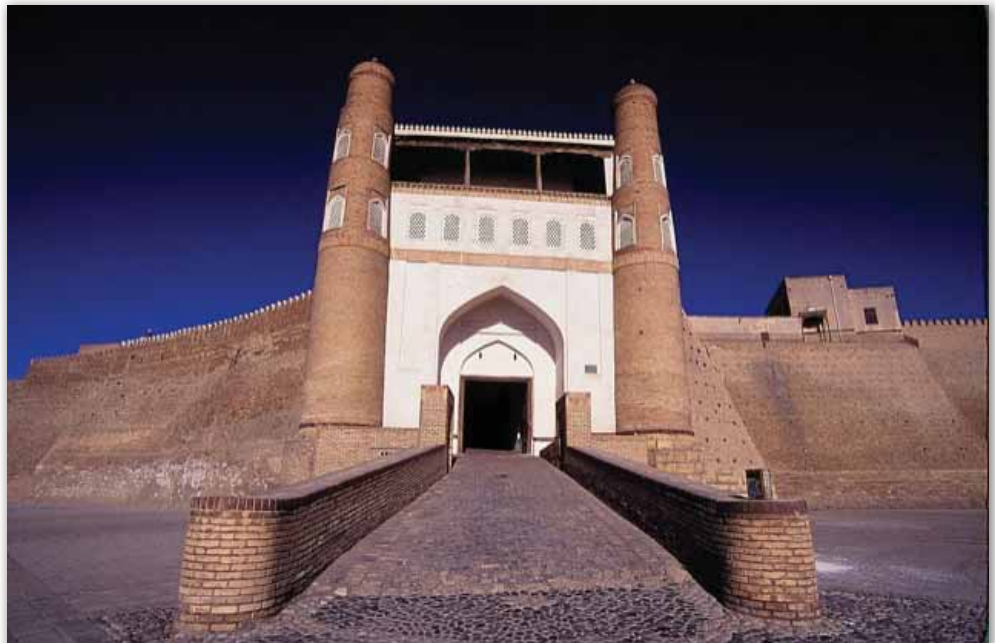
Day Thirteen, Tuesday, October 6

Samarkand

Today the train arrives in **Samarkand, Tamerlane's blue-tiled capital**. Perhaps the best-known of Silk Road towns, Samarkand, fabled oasis on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, has been settled since the 6th century BC.

UNESCO calls Samarkand the “**Crossroad of Cultures.**” It has been visited through time by many of the world's conquerors – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Tamerlane made it his capital city and gathered the finest architects, builders and artisans of the time to enhance its beauty. Admire gracious **Registan Square, Bibi Khanum Mosque** and **Ulug Bek Observatory**.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Golden Eagle private train





Day Fourteen, Wednesday, October 7

Tashkent

Arrive in **Tashkent**, the capital of Uzbekistan, and spend the morning touring this pleasant Soviet-style city rebuilt with wide tree-lined boulevards after a devastating earthquake in 1966. After seeing the highlights, re-join the train as it departs for Kazakhstan.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Golden Eagle private train

Day Fifteen, Thursday, October 8

Almaty, Kazakhstan

Today the train approaches Kazakhstan's "City of Apples," **Almaty**, set in the green foothills of the majestic Tien Shan Mountains. The commercial

capital of Central Asia's wealthiest country, Almaty may be the most rapidly growing and modernizing city in the region. Enjoy **lunch here in a traditional Kazakh yurt**. Transfer to one of Almaty's leading hotels for your final night. Gather one last time for a **farewell dinner** to toast the journey.

Meals: B, L, D – *Intercontinental Almaty or similar*

Day Sixteen, Friday, October 9

Depart Almaty

After breakfast the journey ends with transfers to the airport for international flight departures.

Meals: B



About The Golden Eagle Train

Train Accommodations

Three styles of accommodation are available on board the luxury *Golden Eagle* – Imperial Suites, Gold Class and Silver Class, each with private en suite facilities. Imperial Suites feature a king size bed, while Gold and Silver Class cabins are furnished with an upper/lower berth configuration.

Imperial Suites

Imperial Suite cabins are the most beautiful and spacious cabins available onboard the *Golden Eagle*. Measuring a surprising 120 sq ft (11.1 sq meters), they are furnished with a luxurious king size bed, dedicated seating area, dressing table and private en suite facilities with full power shower and under floor heating. Individual air-conditioning, wardrobe, DVD/CD player with LCD screen and two large picture windows make the cabin a pleasant retreat. Imperial Class guests also enjoy butler service, a selection of complimentary drinks from the Premium Bar List, laundry service and room upgrades at hotels. Limited availability.

Imperial Suite Cabins:

- 120 sq ft (11.1 sq meter)
- Sleeps 2 in king size bed
- Sitting area
- In-cabin dining options
- Remote controlled air-conditioning and heating
- Recessed lighting and wardrobe
- Dressing table
- Personal safe
- Minibar
- Private en suite bathroom with full power shower and under floor heating
- Bathrobes, slippers and toiletries
- DVD/CD player with LCD screen
- Towels and linens changed daily
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water available at all times
- Dedicated butler service
- Drinks from the Bar Car included from the Standard and Premium Bar List (excluding Premium Wine List)
- Laundry service included
- Hotel room upgrade to next available category
- 1 cabin per carriage (plus 3 Gold cabins)

Note: cabin configurations and decor may vary from samples depicted



Gold Class

Gold Class cabins are well-proportioned and feature modern en suite amenities including power showers, under floor heating, a DVD/CD player with LCD screen, remote-controlled air-conditioning/heating, recessed lighting, a wardrobe and a personal safe. Each cabin is configured with upper/lower berths and can accommodate double, twin or single occupancy.

Gold Class Cabins:

- 77 sq ft (7 sq meters)
- Sleeps 2 in either lower standard (4ft 6in) double bed or bunk style
- Remote controlled air-conditioning and heating
- Recessed lighting and wardrobe
- Personal safe
- Private en suite bathroom with full power shower and under floor heating
- DVD/CD player with LCD screen
- Towels and linens changed regularly
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water in cabin
- Drinks from the Bar Car included from the Standard Bar List
- Laundry service available for a fee
- 5 cabins per carriage (Note: The 5th compartment is of a slightly different layout – 68 sq ft – and will normally be allocated to single guests.)



GOLD CLASS FLOOR PLAN



DAY



NIGHT

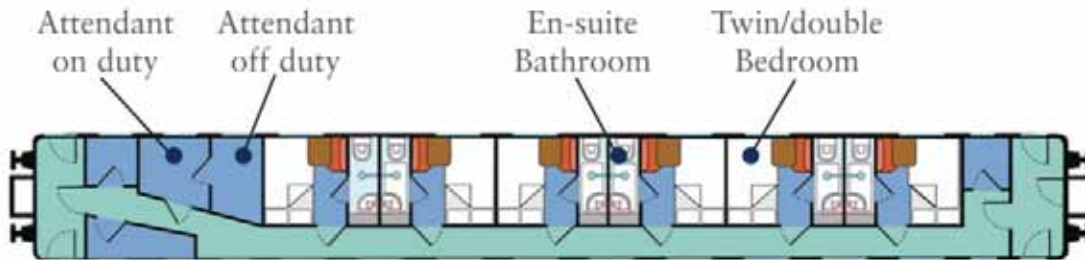


Silver Class

Silver Class cabins are smaller than Gold Class cabins but still have en suite facilities, though with a smaller shower area. Silver Class cabins feature the same amenities as Gold Class cabins but in a smaller space. Each Silver Class Sleeping Car has six two-bedded cabins, accommodating a maximum of 12 passengers per car.

Silver Class Cabins:

- 60 sq ft (5.5 sq meters)
- Sleeps 2 in lower small double bed (4ft) or bunk style
- Remote-controlled air-conditioning and heating
- Recessed lighting and wardrobe
- Personal safe
- Private en suite bathroom with “wet-room” style shower and toilet
- DVD/CD player with LCD screen
- Towels and linens changed regularly
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water in cabin
- Laundry service available for a fee
- 6 cabins per carriage



SILVER CLASS FLOOR PLAN



Dates for 2020 – Private Rail Journey

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note that you need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to the tour start date, due to airline flight schedules.

September 24-October 9, 2020

2020 Package Prices

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:

Silver Class, twin share	\$22,995
Silver Class, single	\$33,495

Gold Class, twin share	\$28,995
Gold Class, single	\$42,295

Imperial Suite, twin share	\$48,995
Imperial Suite, single	\$97,995

Private Train Tour Deposits – Per person:

Silver Class deposit	\$2,500
Gold Class deposit	\$3,000
Imperial Suite deposit	\$5,500

A non-refundable deposit and completed reservation form/signed release are required to hold space.

Land Tour Includes

- 10 nights accommodation aboard the *Golden Eagle* private train
- 1 night hotel accommodation in Yerevan, 2 nights hotel accommodation in Baku, 1 night hotel accommodation in Ashgabat, 1 night hotel accommodation in Almaty.
- Air tickets, Baku to Ashgabat.
- All meals starting with dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on final tour day.
- A generous allowance of wine or local beer, soft drinks and water with all lunches and dinners.
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water round the clock from your car attendant while on board the train.
- Complimentary draft beer in the Bar Car for all passengers.
- Arrival/departure transfers, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates and in the tour start/end cities.
- All guided off-train tours per itinerary.
- The services of an experienced Train Tour Manager, with local guides for scheduled off-train touring.
- All gratuities.
- Baggage handling.

Not Included

- International airfare or surface transport to the point of joining/leaving the tour. MIR is able to arrange your air itinerary in economy or business class. If you wish to obtain an air quote, please contact us for details.
- Items of a purely personal nature (laundry, telephone, bar account, photography at museums, etc.)
- Optional pre- or post-tour extensions.
- Drinks, beyond draft beer in the Bar Car, and beer and wine at set meals



- Visa fees, any excess baggage charges, airport departure taxes, vaccination or medical costs.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1.877.709.5596.

Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021 – Rail Journey by Private Train

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Next year's dates are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

September 22-October 7, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

Golden Eagle 2021 programs can be booked at the 2020 price (see pricing section above) until December 31, 2019. Please call to book!

Note: 2020 price lock is applicable to 2021 bookings secured with **non-refundable tour deposit and signed, completed Tour Reservation Form** prior to December 31, 2019. Subject to availability at the time of booking. Not combinable with other special offers. Offer subject to change without notice. Call for details.

Rail Journey by Private Train

Private Train tours are in a class of their own, offering the opportunity to experience remote destinations in unparalleled style. These all-inclusive, overview tours aboard the fully-chartered *Golden Eagle* luxury private train bring together passengers from around the world. Group sizes are flexible and can be more than 100 passengers.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

- This trip is moderately active, and rated **moderate to rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.
- This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets and sidewalks are uneven, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators.
- On the train, restaurant and bar cars may be some distance from your sleeping car. Although portage is provided where possible, you may have to carry your baggage for short distances.
- Passengers may encounter problems getting on and off trains; there may be low platforms, steep steps and/or gaps between the platform and the train.



- In true expedition style, some delays or changes in the itinerary are likely.

MINIMUM PASSENGER REQUIREMENTS All *Golden Eagle* rail tours require a minimum number of passengers to operate. Should this not be reached, *Golden Eagle* will run a modified service of carriages attached to regular service trains to accommodate a smaller group or offer an alternative tour. If no alternative is suitable a full refund of land payments made (exclusive of payments made for air tickets, visa fees or other expenses) will be offered. Reduced numbers mean smaller and more intimate groups, and a shorter train, as unfilled cars are left behind. On a number of tours Russian Railways will be combining *Golden Eagle* carriages with regular trains departing at similar times. The on-board experience and off-train tours will be unaffected and, as there will be no connection with the regular trains, the *Golden Eagle* carriages will remain totally private and you will not notice any difference to the quality, comfort and enjoyment of your trip.

Important Notice Regarding Prescription Drugs

Please be advised that some countries in Central Asia, most notably Turkmenistan, but also Uzbekistan, have recently stepped up their border/customs inspection and enforcement activities for arriving and departing travelers concerning pharmaceutical drugs. Individual baggage searches are very rare for travelers visiting via private train, but are certainly a possibility. If you need to carry prescription medications with you of any kind, you are reminded to **carry an amount suitable for personal use only, in original labeled packing and with a copy of the prescription**. Package labelling or prescription paperwork should clearly indicate your name, the drug name, dosage, and doctor's name.

Please note that some prescription drugs, including certain pain relievers such as **Tramadol** and **Hydrocodone**, which are somewhat common in the U.S., are **completely prohibited** from entry into Turkmenistan, even for personal use with a foreign prescription. Another prohibited medication in Turkmenistan is **pseudoephedrine**. Please be sure to bring alternative medication with you as these drugs (among others – call for details) are simply not allowed at the present time.

If you have concerns about bringing your prescription drugs through Central Asia, please contact your Tour Specialist before your departure for more information.

Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Armenia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/armenia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Georgia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/georgia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Azerbaijan here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/azerbaijan-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Turkmenistan here:



<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/turkmenistan-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Uzbekistan here:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/uzbekistan-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. Department of State's Advisory on travel to Kazakhstan here:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/kazakhstan-travel-advisory.html>

Weather

The **South Caucasus** countries experience extremely hot summers and cold winters. Late spring and early fall are the best months to travel here. The spring provides a look at the wildflowers, while the fall brings spectacular colors as the leaves change. Rain is minimal. October brings temperatures ranging from 60-95 degrees Fahrenheit. Azerbaijan is the warmest place on the program.

Central Asia experiences hot summers and cold winters. The best times to travel to these countries are in spring and fall, to catch the best temperatures between the hot parts of the summer and the cold winters. Rain is minimal. April-May brings temperatures ranging from 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, while late August-September temperatures are typically 75-95+. Those whose plans don't allow travel in April-May or August-September can still catch great opportunities to visit as early as March, or as late as November. At these times, comfortable touring weather is still called for, with warm days and cooler nights/early mornings. Travelers to Central Asia in March and November might want to bring along some additional warmer layers to help adjust to the difference between mountainous areas and desert areas.

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best published fares available. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carrier for this program is Turkish Air, as they offer the most competitive fares.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

U.S. passport holders require three visas for this tour: a single-entry Azeri visa, a single-entry Turkmen visa, and a single-entry Uzbek visa. You may also need a visa for any country you fly through to join the tour (such as Russia or Turkey) or a Georgian or Armenian visa if you are a non-U.S. passport holder.

An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$388. The Azeri visa is processed by MIR on our clients' behalf. The other visas are processed through MIR's preferred provider. Your exact visa fees may differ as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time, and return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change.



MIR will apply for the Azeri e-visa on your behalf, but we will need you to send us a color scan of a passport photo in order to start the process. The cost of the Azerbaijan e-visa will be added to your tour invoice. **The estimated cost is \$35 per person.**

Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for these visas, which in some cases requires a foreign government approval authorization to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassies/Consulates. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR's preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visas service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss it with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems. **In the event that you plan to process visas without going through MIR's preferred provider, please contact us first so we can pass you detailed instructions with critical trip-specific information.**

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for an extended program in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Mongolia or China before or after your tour. Suggested extensions include:

St. Petersburg Pre-Tour

St. Petersburg is often described as **one of the most beautiful cities in the world**. Its miles of canals, laced together with graceful bridges set amidst 18th century buildings, have earned it the name "Venice of the North." Conceived of by Peter the Great and designed by his favorite European architects, St. Petersburg was meant to be Peter's link to the western world. Capital of Russia from 1712 until just after the revolution, the city celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2003. Explore the fabulous museums and palaces, including the Hermitage Museum, the Russian Museum, Usupoff Palace and the grand estates of czars Peter and Catherine.

Contact us for details, including a suggested itinerary and pricing.

Also Nearby...

For more tours to this region, you may want to check out:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Caucasus, 10 days. Armenia's intricate stone *khachkar* crosses, the bounteous wines of Georgia and the ancient petroglyphs of Azerbaijan are icons of these three intertwined Caucasus countries, where you can experience five UNESCO masterpieces in ten days.

Essential Kyrgyzstan, 8 days. On this comprehensive journey among the soaring peaks, glacial lakes and steep valleys of the Kyrgyz outback, spend a night with a village family, learning the traditional way to make felt, bake flatbread in a clay oven and milk a mare. Visit with a seasoned eagle hunter and admire dramatic landscapes of ochre and umber sandstone formations.

Essential Tajikistan, 8 days. Rarely-visited Tajikistan is wreathed in spectacular mountains and colored with the influence of Persia, the Islamic world and Russia. Meet local people at Fergana Valley markets, explore the ruins of ancient Penjikent and share a meal in a warm Tajik home. Visit the country's capital, Dushanbe, where an airy, light-filled space is home to the modern National Museum of Tajikistan.



Essential Turkmenistan, 12 days. From the golden monuments of Ashgabat and the ruins of Parthian Nisa, head into the mountains to overnight in a village home. Visit the Caspian seaport, Turkmenbashi, explore UNESCO-listed Merv and learn about traditional crafts. Camp at the “Door to Hell” and survey Kunya-Urgench, ancient capital of Khorezm.

Essential Kazakhstan, 7 days. Begin in the new city of Astana, capital of Kazakhstan only since 1997. Fly to Chimkent and discover the historic city of Turkistan with its UNESCO-listed mausoleum of a revered Sufi sheikh. Fly to Almaty and explore spectacular Charyn Canyon, with its strange rock formations and colorful strata.

Essential Uzbekistan, 10 days. Beginning in the modern capital, Tashkent, roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, all of them UNESCO Sites. Admire their mosques, *madrassahs* and minarets clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Please note that no partial refunds are available for any missed days of a tour or any whole or part of a tour, accommodation, meal or any other service not utilized by the participant during the tour. The quoted price represents a package price for the services offered and an itemization of individual component costs will not be provided. Please understand there will be no exceptions to our cancellation policies regardless of your situation. Should you need to cancel your travel plans, please notify us in writing immediately. At the time we receive written notification of cancellation, the following charges apply:

Scheduled Rail Journeys by Private Train:

121 or more days prior to departure-----deposit due or paid in full of \$2,500, \$3,000 or \$5,500

65-120 days prior to departure-----50% of the land tour cost

64 days prior to departure or after trip departure----no refund

References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise



gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).

30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.

Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the “Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth” by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books like *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.




More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.
MIR Corporation



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