Russia’s Southern Steppe:
Land of Cossacks, Kalmyks & Caviar
2014
Russia’s Southern Steppe: Land of Cossacks, Kalmyks & Caviar
Overland from the Caspian to the Kuban

One departure in 2014 – Cultural Series – 14 Days
August 16-29

On this overland adventure, discover the southern Russian steppe, an unfamiliar region spiced with a spirited array of independent cultures, including freedom-loving Cossacks and descendants of the Golden Horde. Explore Volgograd’s massive memorial before learning about the food of kings – caviar – in historic Astrakhan on the Volga River Delta. Visit Buddhist Elista, land of the formerly nomadic Kalmyk people (and home of Chess City), where you have a chance to catch a glimpse of the endangered saiga antelope; Rostov-on-Don, ancestral home of the Don Cossacks; and Krasnodar, headquarters of the Kuban Cossacks. End in the balmy Black Sea resort of Sochi, where the 2014 Winter Olympics will be held.
Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Saturday, August 16
Day 2, Sunday, August 17
Day 3, Monday, August 18
Day 4, Tuesday, August 19
Day 5, Wednesday, August 20
Day 6, Thursday, August 21
Day 7, Friday, August 22
Day 8, Saturday, August 23
Day 9, Sunday, August 24
Day 10, Monday, August 25
Day 11, Tuesday, August 26
Day 12, Wednesday, August 27
Day 13, Thursday, August 28
Day 14, Friday, August 29

Arrive Volgograd
Volgograd
Volgograd • Astrakhan
Astrakhan
Astrakhan • Elista
Elista
Elista
Elista • Rostov-on-Don
Rostov-on-Don • day trip to Starocherkassk and Novocherkassk
Rostov-on-Don • Krasnodar
Krasnodar
Krasnodar • Sochi
Sochi
Depart Sochi
MIR Signature Experiences

- Learn about modern caviar production in Astrakhan, center of the exclusive Caspian fishery.
- Near Buddhist Elista, visit a steppe reserve for the critically endangered saiga antelope.
- Discover Starocherkassk and Novocherkassk, the old and new capitals of the Don Cossacks, and sample traditional Cossack cuisine.
- Experience Russian hospitality as you toast your hosts’ health during dinner at a private home.

Tour Highlights

Volgograd    Mamaev Kurgan, Flour Mill, Sergeant Pavlov’s house, Panorama of the Battle of Stalingrad
Astrakhan    Kremlin, Ascension Cathedral, History Museum, Mausoleum of Kurman-Gazi, Dogodin Art Gallery, caviar production area, traditional dastarkahn, or feast
Elista       Golden Temple, Chess City, Yashkul Saiga Breeding Center
Rostov-on-Don Cathedral of the Nativity, Armenian District, Regional Museum and Gold Room
Starocherkassk Capital of the Don Cossacks from the 1600s until 1805, Resurrection Cathedral
Novocherkassk Don Cossacks Museum, Ascension Cathedral, Ataman Palace
Krasnodar    Dinner in the home of a Russian family, Turgenev Bridge, Krasnya Street, Gorky Park, Krasnodar Historical and Archaeological Museum, Kuban wine shop
Sochi        Mount Akhnun, Olympic sites

Itinerary

**Day One, Saturday, August 16**

**Arrive Volgograd**

After arrival in Volgograd, transfer to the hotel. The remainder of the afternoon is yours to relax or explore the neighborhood around the hotel. This evening meet fellow travelers and enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Following dinner, those interested can take an optional walking tour.

Meals: D – Hotel Yuzhnaya or similar

**Day Two, Sunday, August 17**

**Volgograd**

This morning depart on a full day tour of Volgograd. On the banks of the Volga River, Stalingrad, as the city was known in Soviet times, was the scene of probably the most important battle of World War II. It was here that the Russians finally turned back the Nazi advance to the Caucasian oil fields in Baku in the infamous battle that claimed many hundreds of thousands of lives. Until this defeat, Hitler had lost no major battles; after Stalingrad he won none. This was considered the turning point of the war, but Stalingrad paid an enormous price; the city was virtually destroyed.

First visit the Mamaev Kurgan, a dominant height overlooking Volgograd which today houses a moving memorial complex dedicated to those who perished in the 1942-43 Battle of Stalingrad in WWII. The launch of the German attack on Volgograd on September 13, 1942 saw fierce fighting on the hill as it was key to controlling the city. The five-month defense of the city exacted extremely high casualties from
both the Germans and the Soviets, and even today it is possible to find fragments of bone and metal buried deep within the hill. At the summit is an enormous statue of Mother Russia with sword upheld, which at the time of its construction in 1967 was the largest freestanding sculpture in the world.

In town, pay a visit to the remains of the old Flour Mill, whose walls remained standing in spite of heavy shelling, providing cover for the troops of both sides. Nearby is the house of Sergeant Pavlov, another strategic building that changed hands time and again.

After lunch at a local restaurant, visit the Panorama of the Battle of Stalingrad. First established in 1937 as the Museum of Defense of Tsaritsyn (later renamed Stalingrad), the museum was turned into the State Panoramic Museum of the “Stalingrad Battle” only in 1982. The museum consists of an artistic panorama “The Defeat of the Fascist Armies at Stalingrad” and the museum of the Stalingrad Battle. The latter holds more than 3,500 objects in its eight exhibition halls. Featured are a portrait gallery of Soviet military leaders, war equipment and propaganda materials, and exhibitions on the war actions in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant. Meals: B, L, D – Hotel Yuzhnaya or similar

Day Three, Monday, August 18
Volgograd • Astrakhan

After breakfast at the hotel this morning, depart on the full day drive to Astrakhan, stopping for lunch en route.

Located in southwestern Russia, in the Volga Delta, Astrakhan has a long, complex history that mirrors the events around much of the region. Once called Xacitarxan and burned by Tamerlane in 1395, the city was conquered by Ivan the Terrible in 1556 and a kremlin was built to guard it. Astrakhan played an important role in the Great Game, the Anglo-Russian rivalry (that often threatened to turn into outright war) for control of the Orient, as it was the base from which Russia launched many expeditions into the Caucasus and beyond. Today, many 16th, 17th, and 18th century buildings can still be seen, including Ascension Cathedral in the kremlin, built in the early 1700s.

On the way into town, stop and visit a sturgeon breeding canal. These canals are the breeding pens where sturgeon are raised and caviar is harvested, and your visit here will give you some insight into the production of this delicacy. Learn about the history and traditions involved in this changing industry. Meals: B, L – Park Inn Astrakhan or similar

Driving time today will be about 7 hours and cover a distance of 470 km (292 mi).
Day Four, Tuesday, August 19

Astrakhan

A city tour of Astrakhan may include a visit to its 16th century kremlin with seven of its eight original towers preserved; the 18th century Assumption Cathedral, praised by Peter the Great as the most beautiful in his empire; and the local History Museum, set in the former home of Lenin’s parents.

After lunch at a local restaurant, visit the mausoleum of the Kazakh composer Kurman-Gazi, who composed traditional music for the Central Asian stringed instrument, the dombra.

Next, enjoy a demonstration of a traditional dastarkhan. The word means tablecloth, or the place where a feast is spread, and has cultural significance throughout Central Asia. The cloth, whether on the ground or on a table, is spread with the finest dishes a family can muster, and can include fresh and dried local fruits, breads, spreads, nuts, salads, meat dishes and sweets. Each celebration is unique, changing with the season, the location, and the family’s traditions.

Meals: B, L – Park Inn Astrakhan or similar

Day Five, Wednesday, August 20

Astrakhan • Elista

After breakfast this morning pay a visit to the Dogodin Art Gallery. In 1918, merchant and art collector Pavel Dogodin donated his extensive collection to the city of Astrakhan. Located in a historic pre-revolutionary building, the gallery features ancient icons, Russian and European paintings, sculptures and engravings. Said to be one of Russia’s best art museums outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Dogodin Gallery is Astrakhan’s cultural treasure.

Depart for Elista, the capital of the Republic of Kalmykia. The ethnic Mongolian Kalmyk people arrived on the steppe and semi-desert lands of the lower Volga region in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Looking for more room to graze their flocks of sheep and goats, they brought their Tibetan Buddhism and nomadic lifestyle with them. Generally subjugated by the Russian Empire, a group of over 200,000 led by their last khan tried to return to their original homeland in the 18th century, and Catherine the Great abolished the khanate.

In the collectivization of the 1930s, many Kalmyk herders were killed or sent to the gulags. Consequently, some Kalmyk soldiers fought with the Germans in WWII. When the war ended, the entire nation was deported to Central Asia and Siberia, and was only allowed to return in 1957.
After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the area became the Republic of Kalmykia, and elected its own government, under the auspices of the Russian Federation.

Upon arrival in Elista, check in to the hotel and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.  
Meals:  B, L, D – Bely Lotos or similar

Driving time today will be about 5 hours and cover a distance of 350 km (217 mi).

**Day Six, Thursday, August 21**

**Elista**

After breakfast this morning, depart for a full-day tour of **Elista**, visiting several of the city’s Buddhist sites and its futuristic Chess City. A city of a little over 100,000, Elista was founded fairly recently, in 1865, when its nomadic Kalmyk population gradually began to settle permanently.

Examples of Elista’s Buddhist heritage are scattered throughout the city. The finest of these is the **Golden Temple**, or more accurately, the Golden Abode of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the largest Buddhist temple in Europe. Finished in 2005, the temple’s interior is decorated with magnificent murals executed by Tibetan artists and includes a lovely suite of rooms intended for the Dalai Lama. The perimeter is surrounded by pavilions housing larger-than-life-size gilded statues of the 17 **panditas** – great Buddhist scholars – suggested by the Dalai Lama when he blessed the site in 2004.

After lunch at a local restaurant, visit **Chess City**. Built amidst scandal for the 1998 international Chess Olympiad, this huge complex was planned and constructed by millionaire Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, Kalmykia’s president from 1993 to 2010. The multimillion-dollar center, which includes Olympic-style housing and a conference center, was not finished by the start of the ‘98 tournament, and the contests began even though the main Chess Palace was covered in scaffolding and missing some of its windows.  
Meals:  B, L – Bely Lotos or similar

**Day Seven, Friday, August 22**

**Elista**

After breakfast this morning, depart for the **Yashkul Saiga Breeding Center** a little over an hour away, occupying about 2,000 acres of rangeland on the Kalmyk steppe. The critically endangered **saiga** antelope is an odd-looking creature. With a bulging, inflatable nose similar to a tapir’s, and spindly legs that hold up a thick heavy body, the saiga may not be beautiful, but it is highly desirable to Chinese herbalists. The male’s nearly-translucent ringed horns are an ingredient in Chinese traditional medicine, and poachers have decimated the population in Kalmykia, Central Asia and Mongolia. A migratory species that used to travel over the open steppe in huge herds, the saiga faces many threats other than poaching, though
poaching is primary. Habitat reduction, fencing, drought and large mysterious die-offs have also thinned the herds.

At the Yashkul Saiga Breeding Center, a herd of around 70 adult animals lives in 154 fenced acres, and a breeding program is underway in hopes of preserving and adding to the number of animals in Kalmykia. The other acreage is being used for experiments with arid fodder plants that might support the critically endangered population. A visitor center based in a traditional yurt is open to the public.

Enjoy a cup of Kalmyk tea which, similar to Mongolian tea, is salted, buttered and laced with milk. Offering tea to a guest is an important cultural custom, and is a preliminary ritual to a meal. Kalmyks, being ethnically and culturally related to Mongolians, have traditionally eaten a lot of dairy products, including cheeses and yogurts made from mare, sheep or goat milk. A favorite meat is mutton.

Meals: B, L – Bely Lotos or similar

Day Eight, Saturday, August 23
Elista • Rostov-on-Don

After an early breakfast this morning, depart on the seven hour drive to Rostov-on-Don, stopping en route for lunch.

Located on the important trade route of the Don River, Rostov is a modern city of a million with several important landmarks that connect to Imperial Russia. The most notable of these landmarks is the Cathedral of the Nativity, designed by Konstantin Thon – famous for the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow – in the mid 1800s.

Populated in the 15th century by runaway serfs, dissidents and debtors, the region became the headquarters for their descendants, the Don Cossacks. The freedom-loving and well-organized Cossacks remained a thorn in the side of the surrounding empires for several hundred years.

Take a walk on the tree-lined pedestrian street, Pushkin, and visit the Armenian District, founded in the late 18th century when Catherine the Great granted asylum to Crimean Armenians. Admire the merchants’ mansions on Bolshaya Sadovaya before stopping at the Regional Museum.

Take a tour of Rostov-on-Don’s Regional Museum, with artifacts from its early history, including from the nearby ancient Greek city of Tanais. By special arrangement, visit the Gold Room, with its fabulous
cache of golden treasures from antiquity. (Note, this visit may be re-scheduled for Day Nine depending on the timing today.)

Meals: B, L, D – Attache Hotel, Hermitage Hotel or similar

Driving time today will be about 7 hours and cover a distance of 450 km (280 mi).

Day Nine, Sunday, August 24

Rostov-on-Don • day trip to Starocherkassk and Novocherkassk

After breakfast this morning, depart for a full day tour of Starocherkassk and Novocherkassk, the old and new capitals of the Don Cossacks. The full day tour will take about 10 hours.

Pay a visit to the island village, or stanitsa, of Starocherkassk, capital of the Don Cossacks from the 1600s until 1805. Wander the open-air museum to get an idea of what life of the Don Cossacks was like in those days. The small two-story houses, or kuren, have a narrow balcony and bright shutters, and were designed to withstand the frequent floods that finally drove the Cossacks to their new capital, Novocherkassk. The centerpiece is the beautiful green-domed Resurrection Cathedral with its bell tower.

After lunch at a local restaurant, continue to Novocherkassk (New Cherkassk). This city began in 1805 when the Don Cossacks moved here from Starocherkassk (Old Cherkassk). Today a center of locomotive manufacturing with a population of about 180,000, the city was the administrative center of the Don Cossacks until 1920, when the Bolsheviks finally overcame Cossack resistance. Novocherkassk features a Don Cossacks Museum and the frescoed Ascension Cathedral.

This afternoon visit the Don Cossacks Museum. Founded in 1899, the museum was supplied with its exhibits by all the Cossack settlements in the region at that time. The museum contains an extensive collection of Cossack artifacts, including banners, horse-tails, regimental standards and weaponry. Portraits line the walls, and a library displays rare scientific and historical texts.

Next visit the neoclassical Ataman Palace, built in 1863 for the atamans, or heads, of the Don Cossack army. Used also as a royal guesthouse, the palace features an intricate cast-iron grand staircase, fireplaces encased in gray Italian marble and walls hung with paintings of famed Cossacks. Three different czars laid their heads in the palace boudoir at various times. The renovated palace museum was opened in 2005.

Meals: B, L – Attache Hotel, Hermitage Hotel or similar
Day Ten, Monday, August 25
Rostov-on-Don • Krasnodar

This morning depart for Krasnodar. Krasnodar was founded on the Kuban River by Cossacks in 1794 under the name Yekaterinodar, meaning “Catherine’s Gift.” Two years earlier, Catherine the Great had granted the land between the Kuban River and the Sea of Azov to the Cossacks in appreciation for their valor in the Russo-Turkish War and the town became their administrative center. During the 19th century it grew into an important Southern Russian trade center. After the Civil War, the Bolsheviks renamed the city Krasnodar, meaning either “Beautiful Gift” or “Red Gift,” and today it is not only a trade center, but a historical and cultural center as well.

Upon arrival, check in to the hotel. This evening dine in the home of a Russian family and experience firsthand the meaning of Russian hospitality.
Meals: B, L, D – Hotel Intourist or similar

Driving time today will be about 5 hours and cover a distance of 350 km (217 mi).

Day Eleven, Tuesday, August 26
Krasnodar

After breakfast this morning, depart for a full day tour of Krasnodar. Visit the Turgenev Bridge, from which you can admire a panoramic view of the new Yubileiney District, the old historic district and the Kuban embankment. Wander Krasnya Street, with its museums, parks and shops. The street becomes a lively pedestrian zone on summer weekends. In Gorky Park, at the monument to Catherine the Great, hear more about the Kuban Cossacks.

Visit the Krasnodar Historical and Archaeological Museum before stopping in a Kuban wine shop to learn about the wines of Southern Russia.

Dinner is independent tonight.
Meals: B, L – Hotel Intourist or similar

Day Twelve, Wednesday, August 27
Krasnodar • Sochi

This morning depart for Sochi. This beloved resort on the Black Sea coast is often called the “Russian Riviera.” Its theaters, clubs, casinos and spas fill with European and Russian vacationers from spring to fall, and its surrounding mountains attract skiers from fall to spring.

Russia conquered this area in 1898, officially founding Sochi near the source of sulfurous hot springs popular with health-minded society people of the era. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Sochi was transformed into a vacation spot for ordinary working people throughout the Soviet Union, who would spend their mandated holidays here at huge “sanatoria,” or resorts. Stalin had his favorite dacha built here.

Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B, L – Marins Park Hotel or similar

Driving time today will be about 5 hours and cover a distance of 350 km (217 mi).
Day Thirteen, Thursday, August 28

Sochi

After breakfast this morning, visit **Mt. Akhun**. A drive up the long winding road to the summit of this 1,900-foot mountain rewards travelers with an incredible view of the sea from the lookout tower.

Spend the rest of the day visiting the mountain portion of Sochi’s 2014 Winter Olympic construction sites. The Olympics will be over, but the two compact districts, called the Coastal Cluster and the Mountain Cluster, are interesting to observe. Inspect the Mountain Cluster in Krasnaya Polyana, including the new Rosa Khutor Alpine Resort, ski jumping and racing facilities and the Olympic Village. A funicular travels between the coast and the Mountain Cluster.

Tonight celebrate the journey with a festive **farewell dinner**.

Meals: B, D – *Marins Park Hotel or similar*

Day Fourteen, Friday, August 29

Depart Sochi

Following breakfast, the tour concludes with a transfer to the airport.

Meals: B

Dates for 2014 – One Departure – Cultural Series

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

August 16-29, 2014

Package Prices

5-16 travelers, $6,295 per person, twin share
Single supplement $1,295

Land Tour Includes

- Shared accommodations in superior tourist class hotels in central locations.
- 13 breakfasts, 11 lunches and 6 dinners per the itinerary. A few lunches and dinners are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- Services of an experienced, English-speaking MIR Tour Manager with local guides at specific sites.
- Arrival/departure transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met upon arrival and transferred to the airport on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
- Transportation throughout itinerary by private coach, van, or car (type of vehicle depends on group size).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Baggage handling where available.
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
• Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, insurance information.
• Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
• Touring with MIR handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
• Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
• Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included
• International airfare or taxes – available through MIR; please call for rates.
• Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
• Alcoholic beverages.
• Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
• Items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc).
• Gratuities to Tour Manager.
• Visa fees.
• 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.

Cultural Series
MIR’s Cultural Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. All trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?
While the accommodations we utilize are superior tourist class, please keep in mind that some aspects of the tourism infrastructure in Russia are not up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; however you may encounter problems with bureaucratic service, road conditions and availability and quality of public restrooms. 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.

We believe that this program is designed to be as comfortable as possible for travel in this region. It is rated as rigorous touring because of the daily walking involved, the length of some bus rides 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.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this schedule is accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We do our best to inform participants in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Russia, this may not always be possible.
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

Weather
The most enjoyable time to visit southern Russia is in the summer when temperatures are more or less reliable throughout the region. Rain is not likely, but definitely possible. August temperatures are typically 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit. There is a strong likelihood of windy and cooler weather around the Black Sea and in general at night.

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 fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, 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 tour is Aeroflot, as they offer convenient one-stop itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Russia.

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
One visa is required for this tour for U.S. passport holders: a single-entry Russian visa. Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to obtain the visa. MIR will provide you with the necessary applications and instructions.

Total current visa cost for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time of a single-entry visa, is $243. Visa prices are always subject to change.

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions
MIR can arrange for a pre- or post-tour extension in Moscow, St. Petersburg or elsewhere in Russia, or a post-tour stay in Abkhazia. MIR can book hotels, make train reservations, etc. Call us for more details.

Also Nearby...
For more tours to this region, you may want to check out

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys
**Essential Crimea (New)**, 10 days. Take a remarkable stroll through history around Ukraine’s lush Crimean Peninsula, hanging like a jewel into the balmy Black Sea. Roam from an ancient Scythian kurgan to Chekhov’s house, from the Tatar palace of Bakhchysaray to the home of the Black Sea Fleet, from a Genoese fortress in Feodosiya to Yalta, where the fate of post-war Europe was decided.
**Essential Georgia & Armenia**, 12 days. The warm, green countries of Georgia and Armenia are full of fruitful valleys and saw-toothed mountains. Explore magnificent cave towns, enter medieval fortress towers and bask on the Black Sea coast.

**Essential Georgia**, 8 days. The tiny country of Georgia, hugging the shore of the Black Sea in the shadow of the Caucasus Mountains, has a long history of bountiful table traditions and winemaking. The ancient land of the Colchis, where Jason sought the Golden Fleece, Georgia has lived in myth and legend for centuries.

**Essential Ukraine**, 8 days. Ukraine is the new borderland between Europe and Russia. Explore this resilient region influenced by Polish princes, Cossack hetmen, Turkish khans, Russian communists and Ukrainian poets and nationalists.

**Essential Russia**, 7 days. A compact and compelling survey of Russia’s political capital, Moscow, and its cultural capital, St. Petersburg, this tour communicates the character of Western Russia in a succinct and meaningful series of experiences.

**Small Group Tours**

**A Taste of Georgia (New)**, 14 days. Explore gorgeous Georgia on a culinary and cultural caravan that traverses a country entwined with grapevines, overflowing with wine and abounding in hospitality. In the company of local MIR hosts – a winemaker and an ethnologist who are in love with Georgian food, wine and culture – experience the never-ending Georgian Feast like a local, dining and toasting in wine cellars, fine restaurants, vineyards and the homes of family chefs all over Georgia.

**Eastern Turkey & Georgia: Legacy of Empire (New)**, 19 days. The rugged sunburnt Anatolian Plateau of Eastern Turkey and the steep-sided green valleys of Georgia are brilliantly paired on this unusual back-road exploration. Begin among the folded hills of out-of-the-way Anatolia, watching the sun come up over the monumental stone heads of Nemrut Dag, and then explore the unfamiliar little country of Georgia, where guests are welcomed at tables laden with some of the finest food and wine on earth.

**A Chronicle of Russian Cuisine and Culture (New)**, 10 days. This delectable new journey, led by a passionate local foodie, lets you eat your way through Russia’s greatest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, while taking care to touch on all the definitive cultural sites. You will learn that Russian cuisine goes far beyond borsch and blini. Meet famed chefs for hands-on cooking classes and dine in a smorgasbord of restaurants, family homes, and a country dacha, where home-cooked cuisine and traditional Russian culture come together.

**Treasures of the South Caucasus**, 15 days. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan share stunning mountain backdrops, powerful stone architecture and a strong code of hospitality. Georgia’s renowned winemaking traditions, Azerbaijan’s Zoroastrian and Islamic background, and Armenia’s multitude of ancient churches combine to make this distinctive journey more than the sum of its parts.

**Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova**, 16 days. Traverse a little known region that has changed hands from its earliest history. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are three of the least-frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Time slowed drastically here after the devastation of WWII, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.
**Classic Western Russia: Moscow, Novgorod & St. Petersburg**, 10 days. This indispensible introduction to some of Russia’s great cities gives an insider’s view of the real Russia, spotlighting not only the glittering palaces and dignified official edifices of the Russian Empire, but also a jewelry and crafts class in historic Novgorod, Stalin’s underground bunker, and the unforgettable warmth of a meal in a Russian home.

**Conditions of Participation**

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2014 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**

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Air fares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR’s receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary).

**MIR Small Group Tours**

Cost of cancellation, if received:
- 61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of $500
- 31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;
- 30 days prior to 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 27 years 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 (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), the Balkans (Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Central Asia (the five ‘Stans), Iran, the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Mongolia, China, Tibet and Central/East Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania).
27 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn’t last 27 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

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More Questions?

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

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