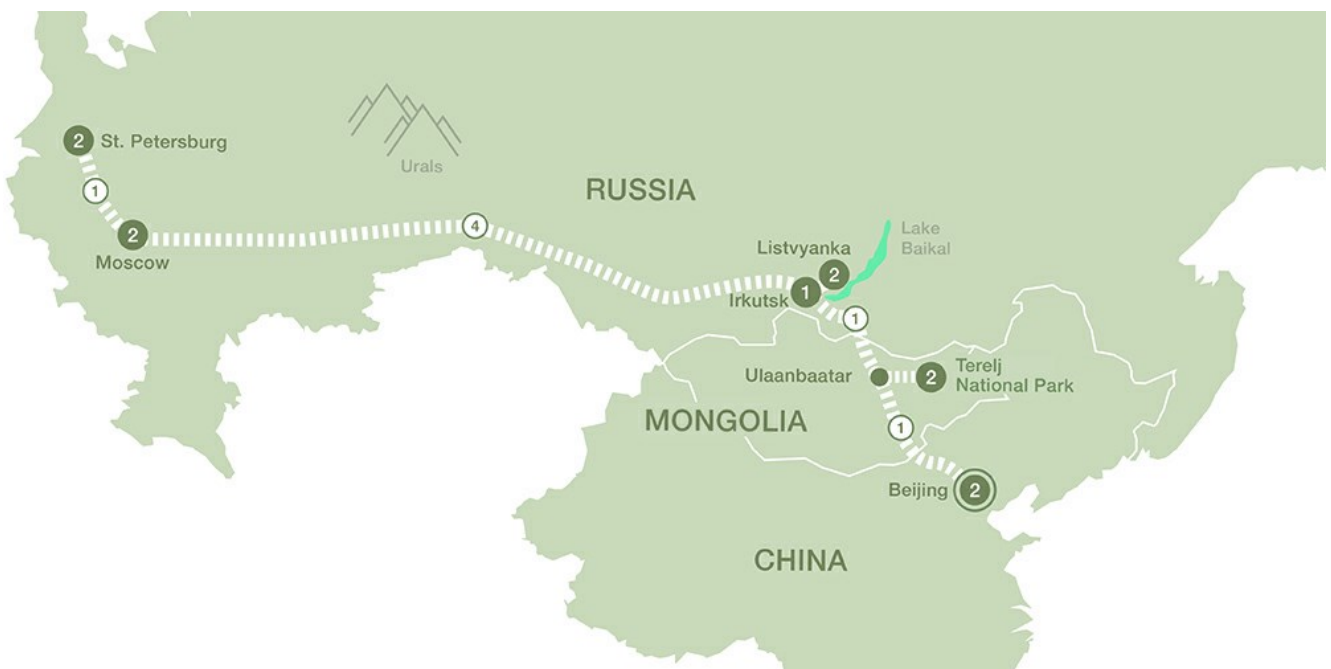




The Ruski Huski (westbound)

| Days | Westbound | Countries | Distance | Activity level |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| 19 | Beijing to St. Petersburg | China + Mongolia + Russia | 8,515 km | ●●●●○ |



An epic winter adventure that's not for the fainthearted!

Leave the North Pole to Santa and get yourself to Siberia for a winter adventure you'll never forget. Enjoy adrenaline fuelled activities amid glistening landscapes. Warm up in a Russian sauna and try your hand at cooking dumplings in a cosy ger camp. And best of all, see the iconic sights sans tourists, like the Great Wall dusted in freshly fallen snow.

Itinerary

Days 1-2: Beijing

Arrive in Beijing and meet your fellow travellers. Check out the Forbidden City for a window into Imperial times, sink your teeth into Chinese culture with a visit to Tiananmen Square or set off on an exploration of the hutong neighbourhoods. Hutongs were first established during the Yuan Dynasty; many of these alleys are protected today to preserve traditional culture. Once your fingers have frozen, warm up over a steaming bowl bursting with exotic spices in one of the many colourful markets or neon-lit laneways.

Day 3: Trans Mongolian Railway

Your first taste of the world-renowned Trans Mongolian Railway. Sit back, relax and watch the magical landscapes from your window. Look out for Bactrian camels and yaks, their winter coats visible against the snowy steppe. Keep your eyes peeled for nomadic settlements, smoke rising from each tent as families stay warm inside.

Days 4-5: Ulaanbaatar and to Terelj National Park

Arrive in the capital and transfer to the nature reserve. Once in the domain of the nomads, settle into ger life. The roaring pot belly stove or heated floors will keep the tent cosy, a wonderful place to return to after a walk in the wilderness or an afternoon tobogganing across the sparkling terrain.

It's here you can try cooking traditional Buuz – a meaty dumpling, or sample some fermented mare's milk – a great way to beat the winter chill.



Day 6: Trans Mongolian Railway

We leave the white expanse for the glow of the Trans Siberian Railway. We'll take a detour on the way to the train to visit the man himself – the mighty Genghis Khan! An artistic masterpiece, his silvery enormity shimmering in the white light of winter.

On board, get to know your group over a tasty meal from the dining car and plan what activities you'd like to do once in the heartland of Siberia.

Itinerary (cont.)

Days 7-9: Irkutsk and Lake Baikal

Welcome to Russia and the pearl of Siberia. Settle into your shore-side home at Lake Baikal and take a stroll around its shores or over its frozen surface (mid-winter) as you soak up the beauty of this icy delight. The lake stretches on to an infinite horizon, no wonder ancient Chinese travellers called it 'the North Sea'. You may see the waters frozen solid, or with a few floating icebergs, either way the waters will be sparkling in the winter sunlight. The crystalline ice-sheet is filled with interesting patterns of bubbles and waves as the water froze in time. Walk, drive and hover over the ice, try ice fishing, dog-sledding or snowmobiling before getting blood back into your extremities in a traditional banya (a steamy sauna with an optional birch branch bashing).



Days 10-13: Trans Siberian Railway

The cultural capital of Siberia, Irkutsk began life as a winter outpost for tea and fur traders. It expanded during Russia's revolutions as opposing elites and intellectuals were exiled here. During this time a signature style of architecture decorated the city in wooden latticework. Today, Irkutsk is a bustling university town with plenty to explore before boarding the train to Moscow.

Back on the cosy train, choose your own pace. Relax and contemplate what you've discovered so far and plan what you want to do next. Push yourself to communicate with Russian travellers, learn some new words and get inventive with sign language; you'll find yourself laughing with locals over shared snacks in no time. Hop off at stations along the way to stretch your legs and restock on supplies from the platform kiosk. Check how long the train is stopping first, you don't want to be left behind on an icy platform in a blizzard.

Days 14-15: Moscow

See the candy coloured domes of St Basil's sugar-coated under a dusting of snow – it'll make you feel like you've wandered into a fairytale. Ask your Honcho about visiting the markets; there are lots on over the festive period in Gorky Park, Red Square, and Sokolniki. Whizz around Red Square on ice skates if the Christmas rink is there or take the palatial metro to VDNH Park for a bigger rink with ice sculptures and light shows. If the cold gets a bit bitey, head to Tverskaya street and hunker down in one of the cosy cafes and restaurants that line the street. Sample some hearty local food with a synonymous accompaniment, vodka.



Itinerary (cont.)

Day 16: Moscow and to St. Petersburg

Wave goodbye to Moscow as you board your final Russian train. Take a moment to relax before hitting the cultural capital of Russia.

Days 17-19: St. Petersburg

Congratulations, you've just completed 8,515 km over icy tundra and three diverse snow-covered countries. That's worth celebrating, and there's plenty of places to do so in St. Petes.

Perhaps begin with a wander along the frozen Neva river or canals – parents will be teaching their little ones to skate on the picturesque canals that weave through the city. Descend into underground palaces on the metro and find yourself surrounded by marble pillars, ornate chandeliers and classical frescos. Stroll down Nevsky Prospect, and take in the magnificence of the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood. Be sure to set aside some time to visit the Hermitage Museum, in the suitably named Winter Palace, for a taste of Tsar life.

Discover an experimental art scene, cosy wine bars, great tea houses and a multicultural food offering, then get to grips with local nightlife in live music venues and pulsating clubs. A local punk musician recently summed up the thriving creative scene by saying “in a city of three revolutions, you're bound to get a fourth”.

Extend your experience: Now that you're in Europe, continue your journey east to other winter delights like Prague, Budapest and Vienna.



Itinerary (cont.)

Journey Summary

| | | |
|--------|--|--------------------------|
| Day 1 | Beijing - journey begins | |
| Day 2 | Beijing | |
| Day 3 | Depart Beijing | Early morning departure |
| Day 4 | Arrive Ulaanbaatar and to Terelj National Park | Afternoon arrival |
| Day 5 | Terelj National Park | |
| Day 6 | Return to Ulaanbaatar and depart to Irkutsk | Afternoon departure |
| Day 7 | Arrive Irkutsk and to Lake Baikal | Afternoon arrival |
| Day 8 | Lake Baikal | |
| Day 9 | Lake Baikal | |
| Day 10 | Return to Irkutsk and depart to Moscow | Late afternoon departure |
| Day 11 | Onboard train | |
| Day 12 | Onboard train | |
| Day 13 | Onboard train | |
| Day 14 | Arrive Moscow | Early morning arrival |
| Day 15 | Moscow | |
| Day 16 | Moscow and depart to St Petersburg | Late evening departure |
| Day 17 | Arrive St Petersburg | Early morning arrival |
| Day 18 | St Petersburg - journey concludes | |
| Day 19 | | |

WHAT'S INCLUDED



Group size

12 people maximum. Big enough to form a posse, small enough to give you space.



Accommodation nights

6 hostel (shared), 3 Siberian guesthouse (shared). 2 ger camp (shared), 7 train (4-berth).



Tickets and transfers

All train tickets are included. Once you have joined the group, most arrival transfers are included.



Sightseeing

With no pre-arranged sightseeing, you have complete freedom to roam. Stay with your group or explore on your own.



Expertise

Our friendly bunch of specialist Travel Advisors are hand to support you with all the essentials, such as travel insurance, flights, Visa applications and destination information.

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