



## Central Asia by Private Train On board The Golden Eagle Caspian Odyssey

A Private, Historical and Cultural Tour from  
Almaty to Yerevan with your English-speaking guides

### **Day 1, Almaty**

Arrival into Almaty where you will be met and transferred directly to the *Golden Eagle*. Should you choose to arrive a day earlier into Almaty we can arrange for an additional nights accommodation at the Inter-Continental Hotel (for an additional charge). This beautifully verdant city, the largest in Kazakhstan, derives its name from 'Alma' meaning 'apple'. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance. Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shen Mountains, you will enjoy a traditional lunch in a Kazak 'yurt', a dwelling place of this region's nomadic people followed by an afternoon tour of the city including a visit to the wooden Zenkhov Cathedral located in Panfilov Park. This evening after returning to the *Golden Eagle*, you enjoy dinner in one of the beautifully appointed restaurant cars as our rail adventure across Central Asia begins.

### **Day 2, Tashkent**

After lunch you arrive in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, and spend the afternoon touring this modern Soviet-style city which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. It is noted for its tree lined streets, numerous fountains and pleasant parks.

### **Day 3, Samarkand**

Just the mention of Samarkand instantly conjures up evocative images of the Silk Road, more so than any other town. Founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia and is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors. Today you will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulag Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. After dinner you will visit the illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square before returning to the train for a late evening departure.

#### **Day 4, Bukhara**

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1999. The most enjoyable aspect of this city is to just immerse oneself in the atmosphere of this unique and ancient city and re-live some of its fascinating history at the crossroads of Asia. The main highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara - the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times. You then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named, Palace of the Moon and Stars.

#### **Day 5, Khiva**

The train travels towards Urgench, where you'll be transferred to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia. A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, you discover its impressive mosques, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls. Tonight you'll head into the heart of the Kara Kum desert and visit the 'burning sands' gas crater fire at Darvaza (a spectacular sight but it involves a long drive in a Jeep and missing part of a night's sleep). The area is rich in natural gas and, following the collapse of a gas rig and to deal with the escaping gas, it was decided that the gas should be burned off. Geologists had hoped the fire would use all the fuel in a matter of days, but the gas still burns 40 years later.

#### **Day 6, Ashgabat**

You arrive in Ashgabat, capital of Turkmenistan - the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum', a monument to the ego of former President for life Saparmorat Turkmenbashi. Situated between the Kara Kum Desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, its fountains, golden domes and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting.

#### **Day 7, Turkmenbashi**

Early morning you arrive at the port of Turkmenbashi, located on the Gulf of the Caspian Sea. Formerly known as Krasnovodsk, it is the western terminus of oil and natural gas pipelines and of the Trans-Caspian Railway, which links the Caspian region with central Asia. It is from here that you board your ferry to cross the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan. The *Golden Eagle* will follow on a larger and slower train ferry. Overnight at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Baku.

#### **Day 8, Baku**

Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, lies on the western shore of the Caspian Sea and the southern side of the Apsheron Peninsula, around the wide, curving sweep of the Bay of Baku. The bay, sheltered by the islands of the Baku Archipelago, provides the best harbour of the Caspian Sea, while the Apsheron Peninsula gives protection from violent northerly winds. Baku derives its international importance from its huge oil industry. The core of present-day Baku is the Old Town, or fortress, of Icheri-Shekher. Most of the walls, strengthened after the Russian conquest in 1806, survive, as does the 90ft (27m) tower of Kyz-Kalasy (Maidens Tower, 12<sup>th</sup> century). The Old Town is highly picturesque, with its maze of narrow alleys and ancient buildings. These include the Palace of the Shirvan-Shahs, now a museum, the oldest part of which dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Also of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is the Synyk-Kala

Minaret and Mosque (1078-79). Other notable historic buildings are the Law Court (Divan-Khan), the Dzhuma-Mechet Minaret, and the mausoleum of the astronomer Seida Bakuvi. Around the walls of the fortress, the regular streets and imposing buildings of modern Baku rise up the slopes of the amphitheatre of hills surrounding the bay. This evening you rejoin the *Golden Eagle* as you continue your rail journey.

### **Day 9, Tbilisi**

Heading into Georgia, you'll visit Tbilisi. Hemmed in by the Surami Range, the city extends for 17 miles (27km) along the banks of the River Kura. Despite the wars and fires which caused innumerable changes in the topography of Tbilisi, the old part of the city still retains much of its original layout, a spider's web of narrow winding streets and alleyways. Historical sites include the ruins of the ancient fortress Narikala, on a right-bank hill (over which towers Amashukeli's *Kartlis Deda* or 'Mother Georgia' statue), and the 13<sup>th</sup> century Metekhi castle and cathedral, across the river. Nearby are the 5<sup>th</sup> century Sioni Cathedral and the 6<sup>th</sup> century Anchikhati Cathedral. Most major public buildings are on Prospekt Rustaveli, the main thoroughfare, named after the classic Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli. Three of city's oldest theatres are situated here, the Griboyedov Russian Drama Theatre (founded 1845) the Rustaveli Theatre, (1921) and the Paliashvili Opera House (1851). Walking from Rustaveli Square we will see the Great Hall of the Georgian Philharmonia, built in 1969-71, which has been acknowledged as one of the finest public buildings since the Second World War.

### **Day 10, Borjomi**

On the fast-running Mtkvari River in the middle of the Borjomi Gorge stands the town of Borjomi. The entire gorge is a vast natural preserve situated at an altitude of 2,625 feet (800 metres) above sea level and dotted with spa towns, and summer villas which date back to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Mineral Park is a former Romanov Palace; set in superb gardens it is an idyllic setting with a ruined castle perched overlooking the river and gorge. The most famous mineral water of the former USSR, 'Borjomi', is bottled here – over 300 million bottles per year are produced. There are several sanatoria, where Georgians and other tourists vacation. Lunch is on the *Golden Eagle* as your train winds down the Borjomi Gorge towards Kutaisi.

### **Kutaisi**

Under Mount Gabashvili sits Kutaisi which has retained many features of a medieval town, but at the same time it is still a modern city, economic, industrial and cultural centre of Western Georgia. It is Georgia's second largest city and was the nation's capital from 978 – 1122. The most famous of Kutaisi's many splendid buildings is the majestic Church of King Bagrat, which was built at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the environs of the city, at the foot of low forest-covered mountains stands the well-known monument of Georgian architecture, the Gelati Monastery and Academy, both founded in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Day 11, Gori**

Gori is one of the oldest cities in Georgia, founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD as Tontio. Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader, was born here in 1879 and he spent his childhood years in the city and later (1888-94) studied at its theological seminary. The small house where Stalin was born is preserved under a canopy outside the huge columned Palace-like building that

houses the Stalin Museum. To the side of the museum is the preserved Stalin's private railway saloon car. The museum is filled with interesting photographs of the man responsible for more deaths and suffering than any other human being. From the town you will go directly to Uplistsikhe where you will have a barbecue lunch on the banks of the Mtkvari River with traditional music.

### **Uplistsikhe Cave City**

The famous cave city of Uplistsikhe dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and is first mentioned in the chronicles of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Carved into rocky plateau we find huge echoing halls, long meandering corridor-streets, chambers for pagan worship and even the remains of Georgia's oldest theatre, complete with auditorium, stage and orchestra pit. Like the other cave-towns of Georgia, it is akin to the similar rock structures of Urardhu and the Hittites, which are rooted in the prehistoric traditions of the peoples of the Near East. On the one side the fortress was protected by the Mtkvari and an almost vertical rock face, on the other, by powerful fortifications. Its strategic position on the approaches to Gori and, in particular, its strong defences made it possible to control the surrounding terrain. There were numerous attempts to destroy Uplistsikhe. Only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however, did the hordes of Genghis Khan's son Khulagu succeed in doing so, after capturing and destroying many fortresses in Transcaucasia with the help of siege machines. The five thousand inhabitants of Uplistsikhe perished and life ended forever in the fortress.

### **Mtskheta**

Late afternoon you visit the city of Mtskheta, Georgia's Old Capital. Due to its historical significance and numerous ancient monuments, the Historical Monuments of Mtskheta became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994.

### **Days 12-13, Yerevan**

Yerevan is overshadowed by Mount Ararat in nearby Turkey, with its snow covered peak towering in the distance. Yerevan has a rich history and was occupied as early as the 6,000 BC. The fortress of Yerebuni was erected there in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Seized by a succession of conquerors, the city later passed back and forth between the Turks and the Persians until 1827, when it was taken by Russia. It became the capital of Soviet Armenia in 1920 and following the demise of the Soviet Union, the capital of the new nation of Armenia. This evening you will enjoy your farewell dinner at your hotel for the evening, the Marriott Yerevan. Following breakfast on the morning of Day 13, you will be transferred to Yerevan's airport to begin your journey home.

**Price:**

Silver Class

\$13,395.00 per person, double occupancy.  
\$19,995.00 single occupancy

Gold Class

\$17,195.00 per person, double occupancy  
\$24,395.00 single occupancy.

Imperial Suite

\$26,795.00 per person, double occupancy  
\$37,995.00 single occupancy.

Prices are per person for the fully inclusive tour Almaty to Yerevan. Air-fare is not included.

Prices are subject to change until deposit is received.

**Almaty to Yerevan (2012)**

October 27 – November 8

**General Information:**

A full passport with at least six months validity from the start of the tour is required along with a visa for every country you visit.

Subject to bookings, this tour may also be operated in the reverse direction on the same dates or cancelled.

A deposit in the amount of \$2,500.00 per person is required on all Silver Class cabins, a deposit in the amount of \$3,000.00 per person is required on all Gold Class bookings and a deposit in the amount of \$5,000.00 per person is required on all Imperial Suite bookings.

**The Train Tour Price Includes:**

*Accommodations:*

**Golden Eagle**

**One Silver or Gold Class Cabin or Imperial Suite for Ten (10) nights** on board the Golden Eagle. Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included daily.

**Baku**

**One (1) night** at the Hyatt Regency or similar; Buffet Breakfast and tax included daily.

**Yerevan**

**One (1) night** at the Marriott Yerevan or similar; Buffet Breakfast and tax included daily.

### **Imperial Suites:**

The Imperial Suites are the most spacious cabins available onboard the *Golden Eagle* measuring 120 square feet and benefit from their own large and luxurious fixed double bed as well as a dedicated lounge area with dressing table. Suite facilities include private en-suite facilities with power shower and underfloor heating, individual air-conditioning, wardrobe, DVD/CD player with LCD screen and two large picture windows. Guests will also benefit from a dedicated butler service, a selection of complimentary drinks from the premium bar list, included laundry service and room upgrades to the next available category at our selected hotels as per the itinerary.

### **Gold Class Cabins:**



Gold Class Cars are purpose-built, new carriages designed for the 21st century to offer top-class comfort and service, which equals the best luxury trains in the world today. Each carriage has five twin compartments, all fitted with one upper berth and one lower berth that converts to a sofa seating for daytime travel. Each compartment offers 77 square feet of space and features its own private shower and toilet facilities and has a wardrobe, audio system, DVD/VCR with the latest flat, plasma screens and air conditioning with individual climate control by remote handset.

### **Silver Class Cabins:**



The Silver Class Carriage provides complete comfort for our passengers. These newly added cabins are slightly smaller than Gold Class Cabins offering 60 square feet, but still

have modern en-suite facilities with a smaller shower area. The sleepers are modern air conditioned cars built in Germany. They are cozy and comfortable, and provide an ideal method of transport for the remote areas of Russia that you will visit. Each car has six twin compartments, all fitted with one upper berth and one lower berth that converts to a sofa seating for daytime travel.

There is ample space for luggage storage and for suitcases in a recess above the corridor area. Clothes hangers are provided and the cars are well appointed with mirrors, bedside table, reading lamps and space for the storage of small items.

**The Tour Includes:**

- \*All meals.
- \*Wine, beer and soft drinks provided with Lunch and Dinner.
- \*Experienced tour representatives throughout the tour.
- \*Russian Interpreters able to speak English, German, French and Italian.
- \*Comprehensive off-train sightseeing program as detailed in the itinerary. Please note that all touring is with fellow-passengers at all times.
- \*A doctor who travels with the train throughout the tour.
- \*Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water throughout the tour from your car attendant.

**The Tour Does Not Include:**

- \*Travel cancellation insurance.
- \*Charges of a personal nature on the train or at the hotels (laundry, telephone, bar account, etc.)
- \*Visas (as required) or Excess Baggage Charges, Airport Departure Taxes, Vaccination or Medical Costs.

**Options and Extensions:**

Please contact Exeter International for tour extensions and options in Russia. All tour extensions are on a private customized basis.

**Exeter International**

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