



## Central Asia by Private Train On board The Golden Eagle Caucasian Explorer

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

### **Day 1, Yerevan**

Arrival into Yerevan airport, where you are met and transferred to your private train, the *Golden Eagle*.

### **Day 2, 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 8th 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. Late evening departure and dinner onboard the *Golden Eagle* as you head overnight to Lake Sevan.

### **Day 3, Lake Sevan**

This morning you will travel along the picturesque shores of Lake Sevan before stopping for lunch by the lake, which lies at 6,250ft (1,905m) above sea level in a mountain-enclosed basin. Several ancient Armenian churches lie along the shores. Although considerably smaller, visually the lake bears some similarity to Lake Baikal in Siberia.

### **Day 4, Tbilisi**

Heading into Georgia, you visit Tbilisi. Hemmed in by the Surami Range the city has an elongated shape, extending 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 which is a World Heritage Site, still retains much of its original layout, a spider's web of narrow binding 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 you will see the Great Hall of the Georgian Philharmonia, built in 1969-71, it has been acknowledged as one of the finest public buildings since the Second World War.

### **Day 5, David-Gareja Monastery, near Tblisi**

Located in remote semi-desert in the foothills of the Gareja hills only 2 miles from the Azeri border, the David-Gareja Monastery complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are 13 monasteries in total and you will visit the main one, the Lavra Monastery, which today is a working monastery again. Built the 6<sup>th</sup> century, it was expanded over the centuries, many caves being cut out of the soft sandstone. In the early 11<sup>th</sup> century the monastery was partially destroyed during a Turkish invasion but, during the reign of David the Builder (1089-1125), the monastery was rebuilt and expanded substantially. The monastery was one of the most important places of learning in Georgia and became famous for its manuscript illumination and fresco painting. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards continual invasions reduced the complex to a ruin inhabited only by a handful of monks. Only in 1988 did work start in earnest to restore the former glory of the complex. Dinner onboard the *Golden Eagle* as you head overnight to Kutaisi.

### **Day 6, Kutaisi & Borjomi**

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. Lunch is on the *Golden Eagle* as your train winds down the Borjomi Gorge.

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 300,000,000 bottles per year. There are several sanatoria, where Georgians and other tourists vacation. This evening you travel the short distance from Borjomi to Gori.

### **Day 7, Gori, Uplistsikhe Cave City & Mtskheta**

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.

The famous cave city of Uplistsikhe dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and is first mentioned in the chronicles of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. It is now listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. 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. Late afternoon you return to Tbilisi and visit the nearby 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.

### **Day 8, Telavi**

Almost 2,000 years old, Telavi rests on the northern slopes of the Tsiv-Gombori Mountain range, at the edge of the Alazani river valley. In the distance and on the other side of the valley are the towering Caucasus Mountains. The microclimate in the valley between these two mountain ranges is ideal for producing the best Georgian wines. The Herekle Palace is the building of most significance in Telavi. It was built by Herekle II in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when he ruled Kakheti, before Kakheti and Kartli were united and the capital moved to Tbilisi. Located outside Telavi is Tsinandali that houses the estate of Alexander Chavchavadze and has grounds laid out as a magnificent English Park. Nearby is the famous Tsinandali Winery, where you will have a tasting and lunch. In the afternoon you head south over the border into Azerbaijan.

### **Day 9, 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, 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, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. 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. You'll spend this evening overnight in Baku.

### **Day 10, Pyatigorsk**

This afternoon you take a short flight from Baku to Mineralnye Vody and transfer to Pyatigorsk. The oldest health resort in Russia, Pyatigorsk is the capital of the Spa region situated below the 3,200-ft Mount Mashuk. The original fortress, called Konstantinovskaya, was built in 1780. The main street is the tree-lined Kirov Prospect to the north of which rises Mount Mashuk up from where it is possible to travel by cable car from the town centre.

### **Day 11, Kislovodsk**

Kislovodsk is the most beautiful and important of all the Min-Vody spa towns. You will have lunch at the restaurant Zamok (Castle Restaurant). In the afternoon you will tour Kislovodsk including the Narzan Spring (*Giant's Drink*), around which Kislovodsk was built, which bubbles up inside a glass dome at the entrance to a long Gothic gallery (designed by English architect Upton in 1850). You can take a variety of different local waters from individually labelled taps. In Kurortny Park (dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, south of the Narzan Gallery) on the Olkhovka river, you can take a cable car to the top of Mount Maloe Sedlo from the top of which is a great view of the valleys and Mount Elbrus in the distance. Dinner time departure of the *Golden Eagle* as you head north.

### **Day 12, Tagenrog, Tanais & Azov**

Peter the Great originally intended Tagenrog to be his naval base from which he would attack the Turks, who held Azov Fortress. It is a pleasant waterfront town with some attractive old buildings, including a recently restored pillared shopping arcade and the house in which the writer Anton Chekov was born, now a museum. Near Nedvigovka village are excavations that have revealed the original Greek settlement of Tanais. We will stop the train right by the side of the excavations.

Azov was founded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC as a trading centre and fortress, it came under Kievan Rus in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, became a Genoese colony in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and passed to the Turks in 1471. The Don Cossacks held the city (1637–42), but were driven out by the Turks. Peter the Great won the city in 1696 and thus opened southern routes for Russia; he was forced to cede it back to Turkey in 1711. Russia took it again in 1736, but was forced by the Treaty of Belgrade to dismantle the fortress in 1739. Russia secured Azov definitively by the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji in 1774.

### **Day 13, Rostov & Starocherkassk**

Rostov-on-Don is a river and seaport, railway and road junction and gateway to the Caucasus. The headquarters of the North Caucasus Railway (NCR), over whose tracks much of this tour runs, is also in Rostov. The town was founded in 1749 as a customs post but was then known as Temernik after a Don tributary, changing its name to Rostov in 1761 after Saint Dimitry Rostovsky. Rostov station is a modern structure but the original station was the site of fierce fighting between the White Russians and the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. Your town tour will take you down the main street Bolshaya Sadovaya, formerly Engels Street, past the walking Pushkin Street and to the Gold-domed Cathedral of the Nativity, outside which is a thriving open-air market and pedestrian square. A hydrofoil will take us 22 miles upriver to the island of Starocherkassk (*Old Cherkassk*), Capital of the Don Cossacks from the 1600s until 1805 (when it was moved further upstream to Novocherkassk (*New Cherkassk*), due to the island regularly flooding). This

peaceful island retains much of the Cossack heritage with many restored buildings and churches.

#### **Day 14, Moscow**

After travelling over 5,000kms by rail, the *Golden Eagle* arrives in your final destination of Moscow. Your city tour of Moscow principally takes you to Red Square, an iconic symbol of Russia's former military and political might. Here you see an eclectic mix of fascinating architecture, such as the ornate St Basil's Cathedral with its magnificent onion-domed spires, the grandeur of the Kremlin and the sombre and evocative site of Lenin's tomb. At the conclusion of your city tour, you'll be transferred to the luxurious five-star Marriott Royal Aurora hotel located in the heart of this vibrant city. Your final evening is spent saying your goodbyes to your fellow travelling companions and friends at the Farewell Dinner.

#### **Day 15, Moscow**

Following breakfast, you will be transferred to Moscow Airport to begin your journey home.

**Price:**

Silver Class

\$13,695.00 per person, double occupancy.  
\$19,295.00 single occupancy

Gold Class

\$16,995.00 per person, double occupancy  
\$23,795.00 single occupancy.

Imperial Suite

\$26,495.00 per person, double occupancy  
\$36,995.00 single occupancy.

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

Prices are subject to change until deposit is received.

**Yerevan to Moscow (2012)**

November 8 - 22

**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 Twelve (12) 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.

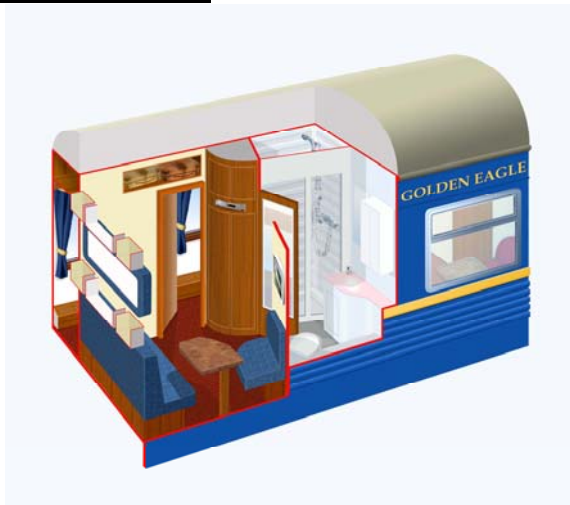
**Moscow**

**One (1) night** at the Marriott Aurora; Tax and Buffet Breakfast included daily.

### **Imperial Suites:**

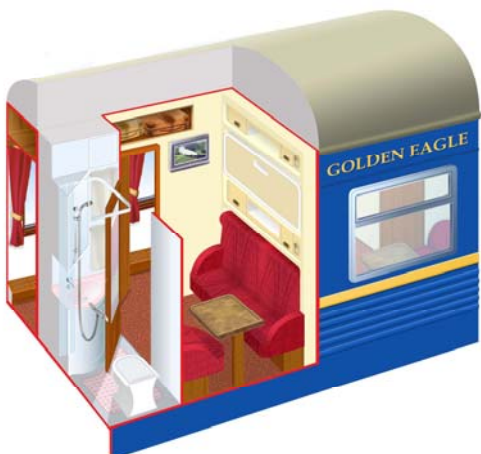
The Imperial Suites are the most spacious cabins available onboard the *Golden Eagle* measuring 120 square feet and benefit from their own large and luxurious fixed double bed as well as a dedicated lounge area with dressing table. Suite facilities include private en-suite facilities with power shower 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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