

Useful information



The following information refers mainly to the former countries of the USSR and China where we believe travellers require more information and assistance.

CURRENCY

Travellers will need local currency for all purchases although at times prices may be shown in Euros or USD. Local cash can be obtained at ATMs at major cities, banks, airports and hotels. Foreign currency cash can be exchanged at exchange bureaux, banks and hotels and we advise travellers take Euros or USD (not AUD). Major credit cards can be used in restaurants, shops and hotels. Local cash will be required for small purchases – lunch, souvenirs etc. We advise against Travellers' Cheques.

LANGUAGE

In Russia there are few signs in English and the Cyrillic alphabet is impossible for most travellers to read without considerable time and patience. Furthermore, with the exception of some staff at hotels, tourist shops and some young people, very few Russians speak English. In China there are more signs in English but still few English speakers. It can be quite daunting for independent travellers when you cannot read the signs or communicate with anyone! We strongly advise you to prebook all your transfers and sightseeing tours before you leave Australia.

OUR TOURS – AN EXPLANATION

INDEPENDENT TOURS. Flexible, pre-booked arrangements including free time to explore at your own pace. You have your own English-speaking guide, car and driver for sightseeing and hotel

transfers. See City Stopovers, Russian Interlude and Russia a la Carte.

PRIVATELY ESCORTED TOURS. Fixed itineraries with free time based on minimum two passengers with your own driver, car, and English –speaking guide as specified.

SEMI-ESCORTED TOURS. Fixed date tours with English –speaking guide for all touring/sightseeing except on rail sectors. Travel by car/coach, rail.

ESCORTED TOURS. Fully escorted group tours on fixed dates with coach, driver and guide. Tour guide may be multi-lingual or English-only speaking. See *Inclusions* on the relevant itinerary page.

TAILOR-MADE ITINERARIES

We are happy to design an itinerary to suit your specific needs and interests. We simply require a non-refundable deposit of \$100 per person to commence the planning. This amount will be credited against your tour cost when you book.

HOTEL CLASSIFICATIONS

The hotel gradings in this brochure are based on local classifications, which vary from country to country and do not always coincide with other international standards. Sometimes they will surprise you and actually be superior! Hotel rooms can be smaller than similar categories in Australia, double beds are sometimes not available and air

conditioning is gradually becoming the norm rather than the exception. Where there are standard rooms and renovated or business rooms, we strongly recommend the latter. In Russia and Mongolia we offer a homestay option for budget conscious passengers who don't mind basic accommodation and sharing with owners of the house or apartment who probably don't speak English. In major cities in Russia a local city registration fee is payable on the spot (approx \$8).

TRAVELLERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Travellers who have medical, physical or other special needs may find that travel in these regions can be very challenging. Hotels, cruise ships and tourist attractions may have numerous stairs with no lifts or ramps, and coaches, trains and cruise ships can be difficult to enter and leave. In addition toilet facilities can be difficult to access. Travellers with special dietary needs can sometimes be accommodated in the larger hotels in major cities. Simple requests like vegetarian meals can be accommodated on some tours and cruises.

FOOD/MEALS

Breakfast is included in your hotel each day. On escorted tours, lunches and dinners are included where indicated, whilst on river cruises all meals are included. On trains, dinner may be provided in first/business class whilst second class generally receives a snack box. Most trains have a dining car. In the

major cities travellers now have a wide choice of dining options ranging from local cafes and snack bars to the very finest restaurants offering all manner of international dishes as well as local delicacies. You'll pay approximately the same as for a similar establishment in Australia.

VOLTAGE

220/230 AC volts. Plugs are normally round two pin European type. Travellers should carry their own adaptors.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TRAVEL INFORMATION

We recommend that you refer to the websites of the Aust. and NZ Ministries of Foreign Affairs: www.smarttraveller.gov.au and mfat.gov.nz/travel. Here you will find general travel tips and information as well as specific Travel Advisories which provide information about the security environment in a particular country.

VISAS

All travellers will require tourist visas for travel to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan. Allow at least one month to secure each visa if obtaining it in Aust/NZ. Delays do occur in the consulates and urgent issue fees that your charge can run into many hundreds of dollars. Airlines will automatically refuse boarding to passengers with invalid visas.

Average monthly temperatures

CITY	AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURES in degrees celsius (min/max)											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Moscow	-16/-9	-14/-6	-8/0	1/10	8/19	11/21	13/23	12/22	7/16	3/9	-3/2	-10/-5
St Petersburg	-13/-7	-12/-5	-8/0	0/8	6/15	11/20	13/21	13/20	9/15	4/9	-2/2	-8/-3
Helsinki	-9/-3	-10/-4	-7/0	-1/6	4/14	9/19	13/22	12/20	8/15	3/8	-1/3	-5/-1
Stockholm	-5/-1	-5/-1	-4/3	1/8	6/14	11/19	14/22	13/20	9/15	5/9	1/5	-2/2
Oslo	-7/-2	-7/-1	-4/4	1/10	6/16	10/20	13/22	12/21	8/16	3/9	-1/3	-4/0
Kiev	-10/-4	-8/-2	-4/3	5/14	11/21	14/24	15/25	14/24	10/20	6/13	0/6	-6/-1
Yalta	-8/-2	-6/0	-4/3	8/14	13/20	17/24	10/28	20/28	16/23	11/17	7/12	4/8
Tashkent	-6/3	-3/7	3/12	8/18	13/26	17/31	18/33	16/32	11/27	5/18	2/12	-2/7
Istanbul	3/8	2/9	3/11	7/16	12/21	16/25	18/28	19/28	16/24	13/20	9/16	5/11
Beijing	-10/1	-8/4	-1/11	7/21	13/27	18/31	21/31	20/30	14/26	6/20	-2/9	-8/3
Ulaanbaatar	-32/-19	-29/-13	-22/-4	-8/7	-2/13	7/21	11/22	8/21	2/14	-8/6	-20/-6	-28/-16
Irkutsk	-26/-16	-25/-12	-17/-4	-7/6	1/13	7/20	10/21	9/20	2/14	-6/5	-17/-7	-24/-16
Vladivostok	-18/-11	-14/-6	-7/1	1/8	6/13	11/17	16/22	18/24	13/20	5/13	-4/2	-13/-7

The table lists average temperatures. However, Moscow and St Petersburg can get very hot during summer months (up to 30°C) and very cold during winter (-20°C). When the snow thaws, (March/April) conditions can be slushy. Uzbekistan and China also experience extreme temperatures in summer and winter.