The Changing Faces of Russia: St. Petersburg and Moscow

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At this pivotal moment in US-Russian relations, The Nation continues to believe in the power of direct people-to-people interaction as an essential way to foster more productive dialogue and support and maintain peaceful relations between nations. Please join us on our latest trip to Russia—feed your curious mind and adventurous spirit while gaining insight into Russia’s culture, history, politics and people.

MAY 8: DEPART THE US

MAY 9: ST. PETERSBURG | R, D

• Arrivals in St. Petersburg and transfer directly to the Belmond Grand Hotel Europe.

• In 1703, St. Petersburg was founded by Peter the Great as a “European-style” capital, and today the city features architecture that exudes refined, Western European charm.

• This evening join fellow travelers for a welcome dinner at the Tsar restaurant.

MAY 10: ST. PETERSBURG | B, L, D

• Meet for a lecture by Dr. Sergei Akopov, entitled “Russia’s Identity in World Politics”.

• Drive to the Political History Museum which contains personal effects, documents, posters, pamphlets and banners gathered by key players in the Revolution including Lenin, Gorbachev and Yuri Gagarin. Dating from the reign of Catherine the Great to contemporary Russia there is a rich collection of over 500,000 pieces including a signed decree from Napoleon, the correspondence of Gorbachev and even a video camera he used to record messages to the nation.

• After lunch at a local restaurant, meet with Polina Andrianova, Coordinator of Projects at “Coming Out” which is a public initiative that provides services for the LGBT community and the public free of charge.

• Enjoy some time at leisure before dinner at a local restaurant.
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MAY 11: ST. PETERSBURG  B, L, D

- Drive to Peterhof. Built by Peter the Great to rival Versailles, the palace stands on a natural terrace with its formal gardens sloping down to the shores of the Gulf of Finland. After viewing the palace, stroll through the Upper Gardens with their famous “trick” fountains.

- Walk down through the Lower Gardens and marvel at the spectacular fountain system. The Grand Cascade, a delightful sequence of 37 gilded bronze sculptures, 64 fountains and 142 water jets descending from the terraces of the Great Palace to the Marine Canal and the Baltic Sea, is one of the highlights of your visit.

- Enjoy lunch at the Orangerie Restaurant.

- After lunch return to St. Petersburg by hydrofoil and explore the Hermitage’s collection of 19th and 20th century-art. In 2015, to mark the museum’s 250th anniversary, the Hermitage reopened Carlo Rossi’s staggering early-19th-century General Staff Building. Totally refitted, its interior now provides a combination of sky-lit atriums, brushed concrete walls and spaces that could well have been newly built for the optimal display of modernist friezes and landscapes. The extra space means that in many cases new paintings, which had been hidden away in storage or in other buildings of the museum, have finally made it into the display.

- This is no ordinary collection, but a roll call of the greats in modern European art. Many of the paintings here were culled by the Bolsheviks from the private collections of Russian businessmen Sergei Shchukin and the Morozov brothers, and even from that of German industrialist Otto Krebs, whose collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings was removed by the Red Army from the ruins of Nazi Germany in 1945. The paintings here include key works of Monet, Cézanne, Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Seurat, Pissarro, Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso, to name but a few.

- Return to the hotel by foot.

- This evening enjoy an innovative dinner at Cococo Restaurant, a 15 minute walk from the hotel.

- Close by is St. Isaac’s Cathedral, which features a 72-foot-diameter dome covered with gold leaf and surrounded by huge granite pillars, each weighing more than 120 tons. The interior was lavishly decorated at the request of Nicholas I with mosaics, 14 types of marble, and an 8,800-square-foot painted ceiling. It is beautifully lit at night.

MAY 12: ST. PETERSBURG  B, L

- Meet for a lecture by Dr. Nina Philippova, entitled “Paradoxes of Russian Mentality: With the Mind Alone Russia Cannot be Understood” Dr. Philippova is the retired academic director of the Center of Russian Language and Culture at St. Petersburg University.

- Depart the hotel to visit the Peter and Paul Fortress, the city’s birthplace which stands on a small island in the Neva River. At the center of the fortress with its tall gold spire, is the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, burial place of all but five of the Romanov Tsars.
After lunch enjoy a private tour of the Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad. This small but extremely moving museum commemorates perhaps the most harrowing period of the city's history, the 900-day Blockage of Leningrad which lasted from September 8, 1941 to January 17, 1944.

Board a boat for a one hour private journey through St. Petersburg’s canals. St. Petersburg, also known as the Northern Venice, is situated on 42 islands, being washed by more than 90 tributaries and canals of the Neva River. Pass the Summer Gardens and the Mariinsky Theatre and glide beneath ornate bridges while seeing the city from a different perspective. Interestingly, until the mid-18th century, there were no bridges and people crossed between islands by ferry.

Disembark the boat and return to the hotel by foot stopping at the amazing Church of the Resurrection of Christ (also known as the Church on Spilled Blood).

Dinner tonight is at leisure. Pending availability, you may opt to attend a cultural performance (options will be made available prior to departure).

MAY 13: ST. PETERSBURG

Depart the hotel for the Hermitage Main Collection. Explore the museum located in the lavishly decorated Winter Palace. The Hermitage was originally commissioned by Catherine the Great in the 1760s as a small building to house her growing art collection. Today it occupies four buildings adjacent to the Winter Palace and the extraordinary collection of European art numbers over two million exhibits.

Enjoy lunch today at a local restaurant.

Attend a private concert with the Rimsky-Korsakov String Quartet at the palace of the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich. This is one of the finest preserved residences of the Russian Imperial family and like the Winter Palace, is situated on the Palace Embankment overlooking the Neva River and the Peter and Paul Fortress. Residences along the banks of the Neva were extremely prized by both members of the Russian Imperial family and the Russian aristocracy. (The BBC 2016 War and Peace production was filmed here).

Initially formed in 1939, the present members of the Rimsky-Korsakov String Quartet are Mikhail Bondarev (violin), Ekaterina Belisova (violin), Alexei Popov (viola), Anton Andreev (cello) all of whom are graduates of the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. They are known for their interpretations of a diverse repertoire of masterworks, Russian classics, and contemporary masters.

Return to the hotel and enjoy dinner at leisure.

MAY 14: MOSCOW

Depart the hotel in time to take the high-speed Sapsan train to Moscow.

Upon arrival, drive directly to the Scenario Café.

After lunch visit the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia. Housed in a 1780s mansion and the former premises of the Moscow English Club, this museum covers all aspects of Russia’s recent history. A private guide will take the group through a series of rooms detailing the revolutionary phase and onward to the space race and perestroika.

After transfer to the Metropol Hotel.
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• This evening before dinner meet for a discussion with Nadezhda Azhgikhina, a longtime journalist, Director of PEN Moscow, and a member of the Russian Writers Union and the Gender Council of the International Federation of Journalists.

• Enjoy dinner this evening at the wonderful White Rabbit Restaurant.

MAY 15: MOSCOW B, L

• Morning meeting with the head of Yabloko’s Gender Caucus. Yabloko is a Russian social-liberal political party founded by former Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Grigory Yavlinsky and currently led by Representative Emilia Slabunova. The opposition is not an easy place to be in Russia, but in a recent election a coalition of liberal opposition parties won a series of victories in local council elections in central Moscow, beating candidates from Vladimir Putin’s ruling United Russia party.

• Lunch at the Tretyakov Brothers Restaurant.

• After lunch visit the State Tretyakov Gallery which includes an exquisite collection of Russian icons and pre-Revolutionary Russian art. Originally the private collection of a wealthy Russian merchant, Pavel Tretyakov, this vast collection of over 100,000 outstanding works of art was given to the Russian nation as a gift in 1892.

• End the day with a meeting with leading independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta which is known for its investigative journalism. The newspaper is one of few in Russia that publish articles critical of Russian government policy. Novaya Gazeta was awarded the Four Freedoms Award for Freedom of Speech. Journalist Anna Politkovskaya, wrote for Novaya Gazeta until her assassination in 2006. Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is one of the shareholders, while the reporters controls 51 percent of the shares.

• Return to the hotel and enjoy dinner at leisure. Pending availability, you may opt to attend a cultural performance.

MAY 16: MOSCOW B, L

• Depart hotel by foot to begin exploring Moscow at the Kremlin. The Kremlin has always been perceived as a symbol of power and might of the Russian land. Each era of Russian history left its architectural mark on the Kremlin. Within its walls are many churches, cathedrals and museums, attesting to the rich cultural, religious and political tradition of Russia. The Kremlin complex consists of a number of important buildings including the Assumption Cathedral, the Archangel Michael and the Annunciation Cathedral. We will visit a number of these sites including the little known Diamond Fund exhibition which was opened in 1967 on the territory of the Moscow Kremlin. It is one of the most significant and largest collections of its kind in the world, a unique collection closely associated with the history of the Russian state. It includes masterpieces of jewelry of the 18th-20th centuries, rare gems, insignia, gold and platinum nuggets of historical, artistic, scientific, and material value.

• Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. Afterward visit Red Square, the main square in Moscow and a symbol of great emotive power for the Russians. The history of Red Square inseparably links with the history of Moscow. Admire its vastness and beauty.

• Continue on to the extraordinary Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed and enjoy a tour through the Cathedral as well as a chance to hear from several members of the church choir.
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• End the day with a metro tour. The Moscow metro system is one of the busiest in the world and, at 190 miles long with 185 stations; it’s also one of the largest. The stations aren’t just transit hubs – they’re a sort of free public art exhibit, and one that tells the history of the city in their design and decoration. The stations were designed so lavishly in the hopes that their beauty would inspire workers on their way to dreary jobs under Soviet rule. These ornate stations eventually became known as “the palaces of the people” for their extravagant architecture.

• Return to the hotel for a tour of the historic Metropol Hotel. Built between 1899-1907 the Art Nouveau style hotel was nationalized by the Bolshevik administration in 1918, renamed the Second House of Soviets and housed living quarters and offices until the 1930s. The hotel is also the setting for A Gentleman in Moscow, a 2016 novel by American author Amor Towles.

• Dinner tonight is at leisure.

MAY 17: MOSCOW

• Depart for Sergiev Posad, a two hour drive, and start the day admiring the Holy Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The monastery is a place of spiritual and nationalist pilgrimage. Because tsars and merchants alike bestowed gifts and wealth upon it, the monastery could afford to invite the best architects and icon-painters to construct and decorate the buildings. Medieval Russia still seems alive here in the incense, chanting and pilgrims.

• Lunch at Russky Dvorikt, a very local restaurant.

• After lunch return to Moscow. En route enjoy a lecture by Mr. Misha Smetnick, entitled “Modern Russian History from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 to Putin’s Russia.” Mr. Smetnick has worked with Gorbachev, Likhachev, Primakov and other top government officials and has a deep understanding of modern Russian history.

• End the day meeting with Mr. Pavel Palazhchenko, the principal interpreter for Mikhail Gorbachev. Discuss the U.S.-Soviet summit talks, which in turn led to the end of the Cold War. Palazhchenko is a high-level Soviet conference interpreter and was the principal English interpreter for Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze from 1985 to 1991. Palazhchenko is currently head of the Gorbachev Foundation, where he is also an analyst, spokesman, interpreter and translator.

• This evening enjoy a special dinner at Alexander Rappoport’s new gastro-project, Grand Cafe Dr. Zhivago.

MAY 18: MOSCOW

• Meet with activist Ms. Alena Popova. Ms. Popova has become a regular fixture both in and outside of the national parliament in Moscow, where she lobbies lawmakers to take a stand against the country’s endemic domestic violence problem. She is the co-founder of the W Project which has drafted a new domestic violence law. She focuses on the protection of women’s rights, combating domestic violence and ensuring women’s financial security.
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- Depart the hotel for Gorky Park which has been totally remodeled. It is now packed at the weekends with families strolling in the summer sunshine or skating on its frozen paths, depending on the time of year. Unlike the jarring, ruthless, changes of the 1990s, the changes to Moscow over the past five years were almost imperceptible on a month-to-month basis. But taken cumulatively, they have resulted in the emergence of a very different city; one that is eminently more livable.

- The Gulag – an abbreviation of Glavnoye Upravlenie Ispravitelno-Trudovykh Lagerei, or Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps – was a network of labor, detention and transit camps that epitomize Soviet brutality and were famously described by authors including Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov and Yevgenia Ginzburg. The Gulag Museum’s exhibition describes the system of camps, as well as their legacy in modern Russia, with artifacts gathered from all over the country.

- Enjoy lunch and your final afternoon at leisure.

- This evening gather for a farewell dinner at the Metropol hotel where we will have a traditional heavy tea at the Chaliapin Bar of the hotel. Enjoy an early evening feast of pancakes with red caviar, original pies and more.

MAY 19: DEPART

- Transfer to the airport for flights home.

- Walk to the nearby Muzeon Park of Arts, formerly known as the Park of Fallen Heroes. Established in 1923, the park gained prominence in August 1991 when, a day before the Communist Party was banned, a statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Soviet official, was dismantled and discarded in the park. In the days that followed, statues and busts of Lenin, Mikhail Kalinin, Yakov Sverdlov, and Stalin from across Moscow started to pile up on the grass.

- Continue on to the recently opened Gulag Museum where the group will be met by Ms. Eugenia Petrukhina, a senior staff member who will provide an introduction to the museum. The museum is dedicated to the millions who were persecuted in Soviet labor camps from 1930-1950 in the so-called Gulag system. An estimated 20 million people died during Stalin’s reign of terror. Inside the new building, which cost more than 300 million rubles ($4.7 million) to renovate, the décor is exposed brickwork, cast iron supports and a series of black metal staircases. One of the outside walls is made entirely of copper and will gradually turn black over the coming years. “A visitor sees the exhibits on their own level and then ascends and sees the same thing from above. The idea is that we should climb up and look down from above on this history, which is painful and unrecognized in our country,” says museum director Roman Romanov. He goes on “It is a space where people – visitors - can meet themselves, meet with their personal history, or with themselves in this history. It is a moment of contact.”
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PRICING

Per person double occupancy: $7,980
Single supplement: $1,670

INCLUDED

• Accommodation, based on double occupancy, in hotels as listed
• Airport transfers on designated arrival and departure dates
• Meals as listed in the itinerary, including bottled water
• Meals as listed in itinerary (B,L,D)
• Water on the bus at all times
• The St. Petersburg–Moscow train journey in tourist class
• All sightseeing and excursions in a private air-conditioned bus
• All private events and speakers as listed
• All entrance fees listed
• Services of an English-speaking local guide/tour manager who will travel with the group from the beginning to end
• Services of a local guide in St. Petersburg and Moscow
• Meeting rooms as listed
• Private boat on the river and canals of St. Petersburg for one hour
• Porterage
• Gratuity to tour managers/guides and bus driver

DOES NOT INCLUDE

• International airfare to and from Russia
• Drinks with meals
• Passport fees
• Visa fee for Russia, which is currently $198 per person plus a visa service fee of $75
• Excess luggage charges
• Travel insurance
• Items of a purely personal nature
• Theater tickets
• Any item not listed

Scheduled events and their timing are subject to change

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