

The Russian Odyssey

May 14 – June 1, 2022

19-day Cruise from Astrakhan to St. Petersburg through Moscow



TRIP DESCRIPTION & HIGHLIGHTS

From the Golden Horde to the Soviet era, the scenic cities along Russia's grand Volga River have witnessed some of the most significant events in Russian history. On a journey aboard the deluxe *M.S. Volga Dream* cruise from St. Petersburg to the Volga River Delta on the magical Caspian Sea. Discover iconic onion-domed churches; stroll through historic gems such as medieval Nizhny Novgorod; and explore the treasures of Yaroslavl, the Volga's oldest city.

Highlights include:

- Experience Russia's diverse musical traditions at a series of lively performances of traditional folk music
- Explore Volgograd, the site of the decisive battle of World War II on the Eastern Front
- Discover the Russian countryside and several of its quaint and authentic towns
- Visit the world caviar capital and taste the real stuff in the city of Astrakhan

May 14th - Day 1. ASTRAKHAN

Upon arrival in Astrakhan, you will transfer to the docked deluxe *MS Volga Dream*. After settling into your cabin, spend the rest of the day relaxing after your flight or exploring Astrakhan on your own. A traditional Russian welcome aboard ceremony with Bread, Salt and Vodka, will officially welcome you to the start of your journey. This will be followed by a welcome cocktail with the captain, a great opportunity to meet the crew and fellow travellers.

Volga Dream Experience: Bread, Salt & Vodka Welcome Aboard Ceremony

Meals: D

May 15th - Day 2. ASTRAKHAN

The morning begins with a tour of a local fortress built during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. After lunch an optional and fascinating lecture on the famed and much coveted black caviar, followed by a private tasting of this most precious delicacy.

Volga Dream Experience: Concert in a local Conservatory

Meals: B, L, D



May 16th - Day 3. SAILING DAY

A relaxing day of leisure as *Volga Dream* continues its gentle voyage along the picturesque Volga river. The Sun Deck provides a glorious and ever-changing view as we pass small villages, provincial towns, churches, and monasteries. This is an area that flourished for centuries thanks to the large volume of trade along the Volga.

Our guest speaker presents an entertaining and informative lecture on the history and traditions of the places we pass.

Volga Dream Experience: Barbeque on the Sun Deck

Meals: B, L, D

May 17th - Day 4. VOLGOGRAD (ex. Stalingrad)

Presently known as Volgograd, this remarkable city has in fact had three name changes in its tumultuous history.

Originally named as Tsaritsyn, this fortified city was used to defend the unstable southern border of the Tsardom of Russia from 1589.



Becoming the site of many epic battles during the Russian Revolution, the city was later renamed Stalingrad and was known as such between 1925 and 1961. This was done to commemorate Stalin's role in the successful defence against the White Movement.

The city is however, most famous for the people's heroic defence of the area during World War II - which was eventually destined to become the place of a decisive battle on the eastern front.

During our stop in Volgograd, we will visit the imposing memorial on Mamayev Hill - which saw the bloodiest fighting of the war, and also pay a visit to the Battle of Stalingrad Panorama Museum.

Volga Dream Experience: Dinner Costumed Russian Tea Ceremony & Russian Cooking Class

Meals: B, L, D

May 18th - Day 5. SARATOV

Once home to a large German community, Saratov is better known today for its connections to the first man in space - Yuri Gagarin, who lived and studied in the city. Our city tour takes us to the Radishev State Art Museum, at the time of its conception the first Russian art gallery outside of St. Petersburg or Moscow.

Volga Dream Experience: Piano Concert – pieces by Tchaikovsky and Rakhmaninov

Meals: B, L, D

May 19th - Day 6. SAMARA

Enjoy relaxation on the Sun Deck as we sail past the Zhigulevskie mountains towards the city of Samara. This ancient city founded in 1586 is now the centre of the aviation and aerospace industry and is one of the oldest cities on the Volga river.

We begin our stop in Samara with a city tour, which includes a visit to the space museum. Then relax as we stroll along the Volga esplanade towards the Samara State Art Museum.

Volga Dream Experience: Russian Dinner with Vodka Tasting

Meals: B, L, D



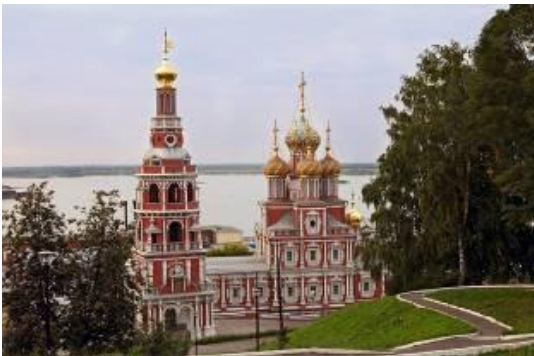
May 20 - Day 7. KAZAN

Today we arrive in Kazan, the second biggest city on the Volga River. One can notice that familiar Christian churches no longer dominate on shore landscapes. Instead, beautiful Muslim mosques begin to appear as we cruise across the border into the Republic of Tatarstan.

We will leave the *Volga Dream* for a while to explore Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan and the cultural centre of Volga Tatars. The white-walled Kazan Kremlin is where the famous Kul-Sharif mosque stands side by side with the ancient Peter and Paul Cathedral. Later in the day, a local ensemble will delight us with a concert of traditional Tatar music.

Meals: B, L, D

May 21st - Day 8. NIZHNIY NOVGOROD



Nizhny Novgorod (formerly Gorkiy), once a wealthy commercial center poised on the important trade routes to the East, became a closed city due to military activity during the Soviet era. Re-opened in 1991 for visiting, we can now discover this magnificent city - hearing more about its history as a place of exile for political prisoners. Walk the ramparts of the XVIth-century Kremlin with its spectacular views, and visit elaborately painted churches adorned with gold onion domes and

spectacular paintings. The evening's highlight is a folk concert presented by a local children's group.

Meals: B, L, D

May 22nd - Day 9. SAILING DAY

A relaxing day of leisure as *Volga Dream* continues its gentle voyage along the picturesque Volga river. The Sun Deck provides a glorious and ever-changing view as we pass small villages, provincial towns, churches, and monasteries. This is an area that flourished for centuries thanks to the large volume of trade along the Volga.

Our guest speaker presents an entertaining and informative lecture on the history and traditions of the places we pass.

Meals: B, L, D

May 23d - Day 10. YAROSLAVL

Founded in 1010, Yaroslavl is one of central Russia's oldest cities and boasts the Volga's first port. With plenty to see, this town will intrigue and inspire. The Spassky Monastery houses the Transfiguration of the Savior and the Church of Elijah the Prophet and an impressive collection of mosaics. Take part in a costumed reception at the governor's house before re-boarding the *MS Volga Dream* in time for lunch.

Meals: B, L, D

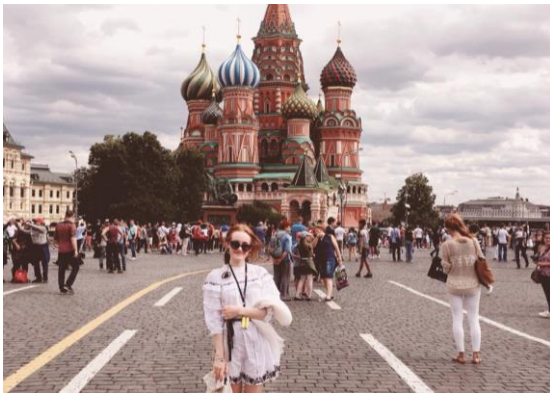


May 24th – Day 11. UGLICH

After a full day of cruising through idyllic forested countryside, we anchor at the ancient trading town of Uglich, a key point in Russia's renowned 'Golden Ring'. Explore the impressive Church of St. Dimitri-on-the-Blood, erected on the site of Ivan The Terrible son's Dmitry murder. To end the day, attend an enchanting choral music concert performed in St. John's Church.

Meals: B, L, D

May 25th - Day 12. MOSCOW



We begin day 12 in Russia's capital - Moscow, home to a diverse population of nearly 12 million people. This ever evolving city is a must see for both first time and repeat visitors to Russia. After a filling lunch, we begin with an orientation tour of the city.

The orientation tour includes the magnificent Red Square and its famous landmarks. We drive by the Cathedral of Christ the Savior — one of Russia's most important cathedrals, demolished

in the time of Stalin and fully restored in 1990.

Then we head for the famous Novodevichy Cemetery — the nation's honored ground and final resting place for Russia's most renowned and influential people throughout history. Among them are noted Russian authors, musicians, playwrights and poets alongside famous actors, political leaders and scientists.

The tour continues in the spectacular Moscow Metro, famed for its architectural splendour. One of the USSR's most pioneering projects – the Metro houses designs, statues and elements from Soviet Russia, and is truly akin to stepping back in time. A must-see during your visit to Moscow, and a tourist attraction in itself.

Late afternoon check-in at the five-star Ararat Park Hyatt Hotel ***** for two nights.

Meals: B, L

City tour includes: Tverskaya Street, Lubyanka Square, Kremlin embankment, Cathedral of Christ the Savior (entrance if time and availability allows), Novodevichy Cemetery (visit), Novodevichy convent (photo stop) & Moscow Metro Tour.

May 26th - Day 13. MOSCOW



After your 5-star hotel breakfast, the morning starts with a stroll through the famous Moscow Kremlin with its beautiful cathedrals and unique museums. The excursion also takes you to the beautifully frescoed 15th-century Assumption and Archangel Cathedrals.

You will then proceed with a tour of The Armory Museum. This famous museum hosts an impressive collection of opulent coronation finery, hand-forged Armor and ancient weapons, royal carriages and sleighs.

Next are the magnificent Red Square and its famous landmarks — notably the iconic St. Basil's cathedral (outside), a colourful multi-domed complex whose architects were supposedly blinded by Ivan the Terrible so that they would never again be able to recreate such splendour.

After a delicious lunch in one of our personal favourite restaurants, you will visit the Tretyakov Art Gallery — an extensive museum complex that houses the largest collection of Russian fine art – with examples from medieval icons to 19th Century “Golden Age” masterpieces. The gallery was established in 1856 and is now frequented by over a million visitors per year.

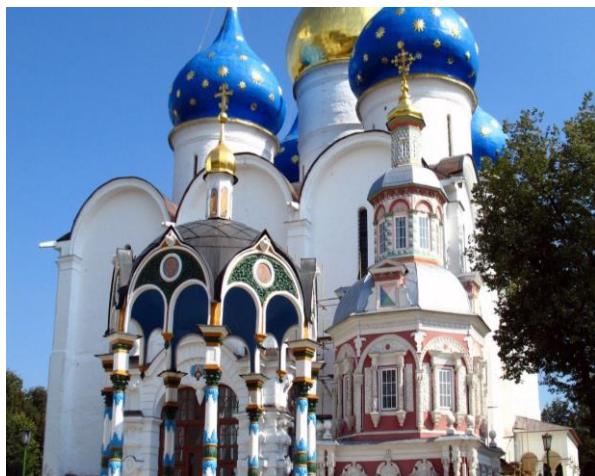
The rest of the day is left open for independent city touring. We recommend that you take a stroll to the new Zaryadye Park - walking distance from the Red Square.

Stay the night at the five-star Ararat Park Hyatt Hotel *****

Meals: B, L

Today's tour includes: the Kremlin complex (visit), visit to Assumption and Archangel Cathedrals, the Armory (visit), Red Square walking tour, St. Basil's Cathedral (photo stop w/o entrance), GUM Department Store (entrance if time allows) and Tretyakov gallery (visit)

May 27th - Day 14. SERGIEV POSAD. TRANSFER TO UGLICH



After breakfast at the hotel, have your luggage packed for a comfortable and scenic bus transfer to Uglich city, to board MS Volga Dream and continue the cruise.

On the journey, we will take a stop at the charming ancient town of Sergiev Posad to go on a special guided city tour. The excursion is provided by one of the local monks who serve in the famous city monastery. On the tour you will visit the spiritual centre of the Russian Orthodox Church - the Holy Trinity Lavra of St.Sergius and its many architectural wonders,

including the majestic Trinity Cathedral and unique Dukhovskaya church. Being protected by UNESCO, the Holy Trinity Lavra of St.Sergius and its cathedrals will impress with their immaculate and carefully preserved decorations and fascinating history.

After completing the tour of Sergiev Posad, we will continue our bus journey to Uglich to board MS Volga Dream. Once onboard, enjoy a delicious dinner as we continue onward to our next destination

Meals: B, L, D

May 28 - Day 15. YAROSLAVL

Alternative sightseeing for repeated visitors (TBC).

Meals: B, L, D

May 29 - Day 16. GORITSY

In this authentic Russian settlement, we visit the unique Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, founded in 1397, and home to one of the world's finest collections of Russian icons. After a guided tour of this important landmark, we continue cruising towards the majestic Lake Onega.

Volga Dream Experience: Barbeque on the open deck

Meals: B, L, D

May 30 - Day 17. KIZHI

Karelia is a region that must be seen to be believed. Its vast and diverse wilderness of forest and water spans all the way from St. Petersburg to the Arctic Circle. The famous Lake Onega is fed by an incredible 58 rivers and is home to 1,369 islands. Our tour will take you to perhaps one of the most visually stunning of these islands - Kizhi. This unique island is known for its quaint collection of ancient wooden houses and windmills. One of the more famous architectural sights of Kizhi Island is the remarkable Transfiguration church, that was built in 1714 without a single nail being used in its construction.

Volga Dream Experience: Russian Dinner with Vodka Tasting

Meals: B, L, D



May 31 - Day 18. SVIRSTROY

The start of your voyage will begin in the traditional and authentic town of Svirstroy. The highlight of your day in Svirstroy is being invited into a local resident's home where warm and welcoming villagers will offer tea with jam and "pirozhki" (local pies). They will enthusiastically educate you on our Russian traditions, lifestyle and the attractions of Svirstroy village, while proudly showing off their homes and kitchen gardens. After tea, hop on our bus to tour the nearby town, see a spectacular WWII memorial and visit a local primary school.

Volga Dream Experience: Volga Dream Experience: Farewell dinner

Meals: B, L, D



June 1st - Day 19. ST. PETERSBURG

To conclude your memorable 18-day Russian experience - after an inclusive breakfast, you will check-out from your cabin, and we will transfer you to the airport - ready for your flight to your next chosen destination.

Meals: B

All arrangements are subject to availability and modification if necessary. Weather, heavy traffic and other unforeseen circumstances may affect the order of the sightseeing program.