



**JULY 15 - JULY 25, 2020**  
**Abandoned Russia tour**

Epic trip at the edge of the world. Magadan - Yakutia and all kinds of madness in between!!

From 6,800 USD per person

**Overall**

For fans of adventure, history, the obscure, and the evocative — this is the experience of a lifetime! See remote settlements, people living all kinds of lives across the region, abandoned gulags, abandoned towns and cities, stunning landscapes, enormous diamond pits, and so much more.

This tour will be led by our general manager and travel specialist Simon Cockerell, who first visited Magadan in the deep winter of 2010 to research this tour. Fascinated with the history of the Soviet Union, Simon has considerable knowledge of the area, and has been to Russia over 30 times and to every corner of the country — the known and unknown, famous, infamous, and ignored!

We have been running the particular tour every second year since 2010 and it is now in its 5th incarnation — and better than ever! The remote edges of Russia can be a harsh and unforgiving place, with long journeys, gruelling roads, and other logistical issues. However, the rewards of amazing landscapes, incredible people, and some unsettling and tragic-yet-compelling history having been lived and left in this area more than make up for it. See for yourself with the specialist who developed the itinerary specially for Koryo Tours' adventurous travellers!

**Highlights**

- Magadan City - evocative settlement at the edge of Russia - famous for being a transit point for prisoner transfers
- Dneprovsky Gulag - once a tin ore mine and home to thousands of 'zeks'. closed in 1953 and left for the tundra to reclaim. See what is left and camp in this saddest of places. Hear tales of how this dreadful system came to be
- Kadykchan - once-thriving pioneer city from the early 1960s. home to thousands of optimistic young adventuring families. Not an abandoned ruin and testament to Russia of the 1990s. not a soul remains, but the city's structure is all there to see and explore
- Ust-Nera - remote settlement halfway along the 'road of bones' (the Kolyma Highway). surrounded by stark mountains and stunning views. see life in this unexpected place
- Yakutsk - the largest city in the world built on permafrost, capital of the vast Sakha Republic and home to native people as well as descendants of European settlers. a cosmopolitan city in the middle of nowhere
- Mirny - home to the second largest hole ever dug by man, and key to the diamond-drive wealth of the region. deep in the forests. see this once-closed city and learn how it came to be that people could live here from settlement to this day



## Itinerary

### Briefing Day - July 15 | Wednesday

The tour begins in Magadan – it's up to you to get here but we offer as much support as possible. There are flights from various places in Russia such as Moscow and Khabarovsk, easy connections from Vladivostok, from Harbin and Beijing in China, and we can help with those coming in from elsewhere. Regardless of your arrival time we provide a transfer from Magadan airport to the city centre for check-in so please look into flights and contact us for advice. It is not a problem to arrive a day early if this suits you better, we can arrange extra nights at the hotel for anyone who needs them.

On arrival in the city the group will meet our lovely local partners Vika, and Volodya. They will explain some basics about the history and geography of the region – we'll learn more in detail later on. We'll check in to the VM-Tsentr Hotel. The location is terrific and it's a very comfortable place (the voucher the staff gives you when you check in is for one free drink in the hotel bar – it's only written in Russian). We'll have a group dinner and then you're free to wander the city. Our local friends can recommend places to go, things to see and do. Remember that it stays light late into the night here so you don't have to worry about getting lost in the dark. The city isn't huge and can easily be wandered around on foot without too much difficulty; you'll find it a very interesting place indeed!

### Day 1 - July 16 | Thursday

#### Arrival Day

Flights to Astana (airport code TSE) arrive from many international destinations – let us know which flight you will be on and we will arrange your pick-up and transfer to the hotel. Arriving even earlier is of course fine and can be accommodated

Today we start the tour with a group dinner of some excellent local food, coordination and briefing session, before the adventure ahead!

Overnight: Astana - Kazakhstan's shiny new Capital City!



### Day 2 - July 17 | Friday

We head off along the Kolyma Highway (known in the west as the 'road of bones') – the longest road in the world and one built by prisoners to ease the passage of many more unfortunate souls into the inner-depths



of the Kolyma area, from where many would never return. We're heading for the Dneprovsky Gulag Camp – one of the most complete remaining camps in the area (note that these camps are not preserved as museums, they are left to crumble and decay, in a few years almost nothing will be left to see of this dark place). The drive will be done in a Kamaz truck – a large multi-axle Russian vehicle that can traverse the 20km of deep forest we need to drive through to make it to the Gulag site. Along the way we'll make some stops for rest and refreshment including at the abandoned town of Atka, which we will have time to explore.

We should arrive at the Gulag in early afternoon and then we'll set off on a hike around the area; we'll be guided by a local gulag historian and expert, he'll give us a fascinating insight into what went on here and has many a heart-breaking story to tell, and some amazing statistics, feel free to ask anything you like about the Gulag, he knows a great deal indeed! Bears do pass through this area but fear not! We also take a couple of local hunters and drivers with us who know the Russian outdoors very well, they will ensure our safety and security on this part of the trip, and also pitch camp for us to rest and eat a terrific meal of local specialties after we have finished exploring the Gulag site. Some of the highlights of this exploration include guard towers, the mine entrance (it was a tin mine), the cemetery, bread making buildings, officers houses. It's a chilling and fascinating place to visit, let alone spend the night. The sun will be up until about 2AM here but get some sleep if you can we surge onwards the next day!

### **Day 3 - July 18 | Saturday**

We'll break camp and head for a few more Gulag sites here, including a demolished factory site. Then we'll make our way back to the highway and switch from the Kamaz truck to some comfortable mini-buses that we will now use along the Road of Bones. In the buses we'll drive onwards enjoying some amazing scenery and surroundings for most of the rest of the day, stopping at a truck-stop for lunch and finally arriving in the remote and unusual city of Susuman in the late afternoon.

Susuman is very run down and some parts even seem abandoned, but thousands of people live here, there are shops, a restaurant (where we will have dinner), and a guesthouse run by a local factory (where we will spend the night), it also has some interesting things to see on a wander around the town such as a young scientists institute which for some reason has an airplane sticking out of an apartment building, some soviet-era apartment building murals and signs, a church, and often curious locals who are happy to chat and interact with the rare visitors to their city. If you want a night out in Susuman then go right ahead but it's definitely a good idea to get some rest, something truly amazing awaits us the next day!

### **Day 4 - July 19 | Sunday**

Up early, first we hit the shops for supplies, then we drive on a further 90 mins to the largest abandoned city in this region; Kadykchan. This truly is the ideal abandoned town (if such a concept even exists!) – it's the right size to spend a whole day wandering around without going through the same buildings twice, but small enough to know where you are all the time, the buildings haven't been inhabited in two decades but most of the apartment blocks have held up very well. We can explore apartments, the city government building, schools (the highlight we believe, just for the murals alone), hospitals, restaurants, shops, etc. all left to the ravages of nature. It's spooky and mind-blowing and we can guarantee that you'll never forget this day! On previous visits some amazing souvenirs such as old school books, license plates, signs, etc. have been found too, so you'll definitely be able to get yourself some amazingly unique mementoes of this



fascinating day. Trust us when we say this will be among the most memorable days of your life – it has to be experienced to be believed!

We'll eat a picnic lunch on the spot and then in the evening you have a choice of accommodation; either return to Susuman for another night in the hotel there, or occupy an abandoned apartment and become one of the very few Kadykchan residents of the 21st Century. If taking the second option then expect no electricity, no running water, no furniture (we will have camping equipment) and a general sense of post-apocalyptic living. It'll be a night like no other; you'll almost not want to sleep at all!

### Day 5 - July 20 | Monday

Those who stayed overnight in Susuman will head back to Kadykchan to collect those who camped out with the ghosts and memories, for the latter group if you get up in good time you can squeeze in a couple more hours of Kadykchan exploration (after comparing notes with what everyone else discovered this is a very good idea), otherwise have a lie-in until pick-up and we'll head off along the highway mid morning, stopping for lunch at a rest-stop along the way.

Our destination today is Ust-Nera, a riverside settlement on the northern edge of the Road of Bones. We'll arrive here late afternoon and we'll try out a Central Asian cafe very far from the 'Stans! There will be free time to relax or to explore the city today as well (remember it gets dark very very late!) and we'll stay overnight in a local hotel.



### Day 6 - July 21 | Tuesday

A free morning in Ust-Nera! Our local partners can show us around or you can go off on your own to see what there is to see in the town. We'll have lunch at leisure and then assemble again to go to the small local airport. Here we will board one of the few flights that leaves Ust-Nera and take the 2 hour flight out of Magadan province and to the city at the other end of the Road of Bones, the capital of the vast Sakha Republic; Yakutsk! On arrival in this city we'll get picked up and head for the city centre, our hotel awaits so we will check in and then have a brief orientation with a local expert about what Yakutsk is all about; its history, ethnography, geography, and more. Look for Yakutsk on a map – it's nowhere near anything else so the very fact of its existence is an oddity, one that we will learn all about! Also (for trivial fans) it's the largest city in the world built on permafrost – see the stilts that hold up all of the buildings around the city



for a quirky architectural feature here. Tonight have a free evening to do whatever you like (our local friends will advise if you need some help, it's a safe town with plenty of nightlife options for drinks, wandering around, restaurants, and so on).

#### **Day 7 - July 22 | Wednesday**

We'll take a flight from Yakutsk to a place even more remote and obscure; a town called Mirny, about 2.5 hours deep into the heart of Siberian Russia, a place remote even by the standards of Russians. A place that exists for one reason only; Diamonds! In the heart of the town is the second deepest pit ever dug by man, a giant hole from whence untold tons of diamonds have been hauled from deep within the earth. The raw statistics tell one story (you can read all about it here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir\\_mine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir_mine)) but getting to visit the site is something else entirely. The exact level of access we can gain is not finalised yet but we'll have gone somewhere very unusual and somewhere to shame the holiday destinations of your friends! We'll spend as much time here as possible and stay the night in Mirny too. It will be a long, expensive, and arduous journey, but one that will provide an unbeatable experience in deepest Russia, something that will stick in the mind forever!

#### **Day 8 - July 23 | Thursday**

The morning is spent exploring the town of Mirny, even though the mine may not operate any more there is still a population of people living in this seemingly unlivable remote place, we'll see what life here is all about and see what local businesses and people are up to. Human interaction is important on any holiday and we'll get as much as we can at this point. An organised tour in the morning, lunch at a local restaurant and then free time to do some more exploring. the locals are friendly, the streets are easy to navigate, one coffee shop has very good wifi (best for hundreds of miles!) and there are even some well-hidden local souvenirs! enjoy a busy or leisurely time in this amazing remote settlement!

#### **Day 9 - July 24 | Friday**

We set off for the airport and fly back to the local capital, Yakutsk. When we hit the ground we will begin a city tour of this fascinating place - the highlights of Yakutsk include old and new buildings so we can see the evolution of the architectural style, a truly remarkable church, a massive war memorial along the mighty Lena River, and much much more – including the Kingdom of Permafrost – a subterranean look at frozen ground, much more interesting than it sounds, as well as the mammoth museum where you can see how specimens of this extinct beast are recovered from the area, and meet a local expert who travels around digging them up from the ice. We will have a final group dinner in a very nice local restaurant and then the evening will be free for us to have a night out in the quasi-European local bars and restaurants and to wander the city, interacting as much as possible with the very diverse local population, a highlight in and of itself and an amazing way to finish off a remarkable journey!

#### **Day 10 - July 25 | Saturday**

##### **Departure Day**

There are flights this day to Moscow (from where almost anywhere in Europe can be reached, as well as North America), and to Harbin (in Northern China, from where you can easily move on to anywhere in China or East Asia and down to Australasia), and other destinations too. So head home, continue to explore





Russia, or embark on even more adventures! The end of the trip but the start of remembering the trip for many years to come!

#### Extras

Upgrade to your own room All hotel rooms on our all-inclusive group tours feature twin beds, and will be shared. If you'd like a room to yourself then you can upgrade for an extra 40 EUR per night.

#### What is / is not included?

##### INCLUDED

- Accommodation throughout the trip - in hotels, camping at the gulag, and sleeping rough in Kadykchan! (tents and sleeping bags where needed)
- Meals apart from during free time
- Transportation by various means - mini-bus, Kamaz truck, etc
- Internal flights on the tour; Ust-Nera - Yakutsk, Yakutsk - Mirny - Yakutsk
- Entry fees at attractions visited
- Airport transfers
- Russian visa support (LOI)
- Guide and translation services throughout
- The most amazing travel experience of your life - hard roads, tough travel, invaluable memories and experiences!

##### NOT INCLUDED

- Flights to start and finish the tour (start in Magadan, end in Yakutsk)
- Meal expenses during free time (approx 3 evenings)
- Russian visa fee (varies according to nationality and place of issue)
- Single room accommodation (it is optional. \$40 supplemental per person per night)
- Tips for the local guides, drivers
- Camera fees where charged (usually around \$1 in museums)
- Incidentals such as souvenirs, laundry, alcoholic drinks, phone calls, etc

#### Notes

*Groups will be in the experienced hands of two or three local guides. Furthermore, for groups of 10 or more, a member of the Koryo Tours team will accompany the trip.*

*Please note that when on tour your day-to-day itinerary may differ slightly to what is advertised above. Your tour leader will ensure, however, that everything available at the time is covered, and replacement options are provided where needed. We will also add in extras when there is time (such as a visit to a local bar or amusement park). We visit these countries regularly so know all the best places to go, and how to make the most of your days there to guarantee the experience of a lifetime. After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails, so you can keep in touch, swap photos etc. If you do not wish to be on this list then please let us know.*





*We ask for applications to be completed a minimum of one month in advance of the tour, ideally six weeks or more if possible. We are happy to advise on the best routings and fares for your travel to these countries.*

**Visa Information**

*We are happy to advise on Visa requirements for this tour and the countries you will be visiting. Contact us directly if you require more information regarding Visa's.*



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