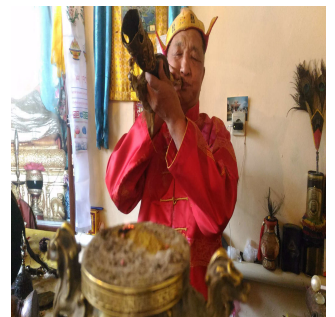
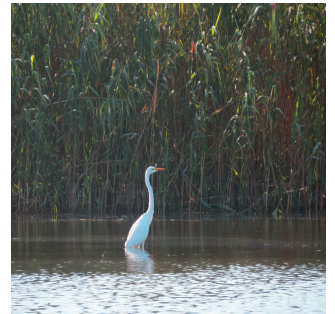


# Treasures of the southern steppes

Ethnotour to Kalmykia and Astrakhan region



On this trip you will see an incredible variety of landscapes, from sand dunes to mountainous Martian sceneries. Buddhist temples, camels in the steppe, and ancient historical sights – join this trip to see atypical Russia!

# Experiences you'll have

## Journey to Kalmykia, Astrakhan Region and Volgograd

On this trip you will visit 3 regions of southern Russia and make many discoveries at once. You will get acquainted with the nomadic culture and Buddhist shrines of Kalmykia and Astrakhan regions, as well as will learn more about the unique flora and fauna of the "Chernye zemli" (Rus.for "Black Lands") and Bogdinsko-Baskunchaksky Nature Reserves. Also you will visit the Mamaev Kurgan, which is one of the 7 wonders of Russia, located in Volgograd.

This tour has a very rich program. A camel riding, birdwatching on Manych-Gudil Lake or in the Kalmyk steppe, traditional master classes and tasting national cuisine are waiting for you.

Top 7 places you will visit on this journey:

**Sarai-Batu** – a tourist center dedicated to the history and culture of the Golden Horde Khanate. It was reconstructed in the place where the ancient capital of the Golden Horde was actually located

**the Singing Dunes** in the Kalmyk steppe – in this place in dry weather you can hear how the sands sound like an organ

**the Golden abode of Buddha Shakyamun**, one of the largest Buddhist temples in Europe

**the unique Mekletinskie Lakes**, where the special microscopic crayfish lives and turning the water pink

**the Big Bogdo Peak** is a sacred place of Buddhist pilgrims and the highest point of the Caspian Depression. The layers of earth formed more than 200 million years ago, come to the surface here

**Manych-Gudilo Lakes** – there are a lot of water birds nesting on the islets of the lakes: pelicans, cormorants, herons, glossy ibis, which you can watch under favorable conditions

**Lake Baskunchak** – there are deposits of curative clay on the shore, and bathing in the salt brine has a healing effect

Take a look also at [the summer program](#), when you can observe lotus blossoms in the Volga delta.

**Note:** for your group of two or more people, we can organize an individual program on any days suitable for you. See details in the "Common questions"

## Itinerary

The trip begins in Elista, where you should get to on your own. We recommend a flight of Azimut airline with arrival to Elista at 12:20 pm on the first day of the program. Please note that the program ends in Volgograd, for the way back to Moscow, choose the flight of the Aeroflot with a departure at 5:45 pm.

We are ready to help with the purchase of tickets, if necessary, leave a comment in the application.

**Note:** the itinerary and means of transportation for the program may vary depending on weather conditions.

### Day 1

**After meeting at the airport of Elista, you will have lunch in**

the Kalmyk cuisine cafe. Then you will be taken to your hotel and have a city tour.

**Elista is one of the largest centers of Buddhism in Russia.**

You will visit the Central khurul of Kalmykia – the Golden Abode of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Seven Days Pagoda, where the largest prayer drum in Europe is installed. You will also see statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Golden Gate during the tour.

**After that, you will go to the steppe, to the border of two**

Kalmykia

### Treasures of the southern steppes

Difficulty



Group size

from 7 to 15

Duration

6 days

Accommodation at the trip



2 nights 3 nights

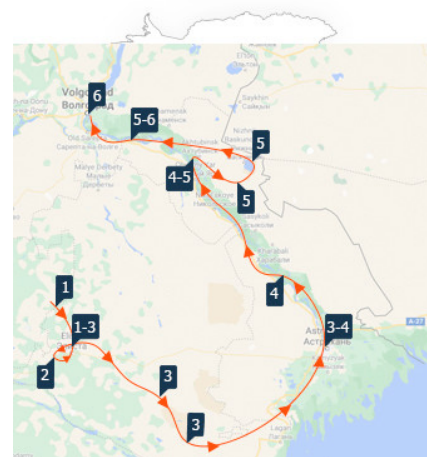
Языки



guide

guide

from 690 EUR



geomorphological zones: the Kumo-Many depression and the Yergenin uplands. Here you will see the the Lone Poplar – one of Kalmykia's places of strength. You will hear the legend of the place and learn why it has become a Buddhist shrine.

### **Back in town, you will have dinner at a restaurant and rest**

at the hotel.

### **Day 2**

#### **After breakfast you will go on tour to the wildfowl**

congregation places along the Kumo-Manych hollow or to Manych-Gudilo Lake (4 hours). Unique flora and birdwatching are waiting for you there. Pelicans, cormorants, herons, glossy ibis, and plenty of other birds live here on islands.

#### **After the tour you will have a picnic and then go to the**

camel's camp. There you can take a ride on camels, which are called the "ships of the desert" and hear the stories about these animals.

#### **Next, you will visit Chess City and the Museum of Nomadic**

Peoples, where can take part in master classes. You will learn how to make a traditional Kalmyk Jomba tea, shoot a bow, get acquainted with "Todo Bichig" – old Kalmyk vertical writing, and take photos in national Kalmyk costumes. By the evening you will return to the hotel, have dinner and rest.

**The route length is 150 km.**

### **Day 3**

#### **Today you will get acquainted with the unique natural**

sights of Kalmykia. First, you will walk through the desert with the "Singing dunes". The place is called so because in the dry weather the sands sound like an organ. You will be taken to the start of the route by car.

#### **Next you will continue your route the unique salty Pink**

lakes. Migrating birds have brought small pink crayfish into the lakes, which have bred here, and now water seems pink. In addition to coloring water, this crustacean is involved in the formation of therapeutic mud, which is used in cosmetology and the treatment of skin diseases.

#### **In ancient times the camps of various nomadic peoples**

were located along the lakeshores. On the slopes of hills, you still can find fragments of ancient pottery vessels and arrowheads belonging to the Yamnaya, Catacomb, Sarmatian, and Scythian cultures.

#### **You will have a picnic in the summer house on the**

lakeshore and then go to the spring, where you can take part in the ritual lighting of the "burning spring".

#### **Then you will go to the border of the "Chernye zemli"**

(Rus.for "Black Lands") Nature Reserve. This is the wild habitat of the steppe saiga. You will get acquainted with the unique flora and fauna of the reserved steppe and, if you are lucky, see saigas.



### **In the second half of the day, you will visit the village**

Adyk, where you will enjoy an ethnic program in a Kalmyk yurt, a traditional nomadic dwelling. On the master class, you will learn how to lasso a horse properly and how to tie a Kalmyk knot. The program will finish with the national cuisine dinner in the yurt. Afterward, you will be taken to Astrakhan, where you will check in to a hotel and rest.

**The route length is 450 km.**

### **Day 4**

#### **After breakfast, you will have a walk with a guide through**

the territory of the Astrakhan Kremlin. More than 20 architectural monuments from different centuries have been preserved here: ancient churches and chapels, towers, gateways, and various civil structures.

#### **Then you will be transferred to one of the main attractions**

of the Astrakhan region, the reconstructed capital of the Golden Horde – Sarai-Batu. Founded in 1250 by Batu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, the ancient city grew out of a nomadic staging post.

#### **By the end of the XV century attacks of enemies, natural**

disasters and time destroyed the capital of the Golden Horde. Bricks from the ruins of the city were used in the construction of the Astrakhan Kremlin. Originally at the site of the excavations was supposed to be a museum, but in 2010 the Sarai-Batu was reconstructed for the shooting of the film "Saint Alexis" ("The Horde").

#### **From the capital of the Golden Horde you will go to**

Akhtubinsk, where you will stay in a hotel. After dinner at the restaurant (extra charge), you can take a walk along the Akhtuba River.

**The route length is 315 km.**

### **Day 5**

#### **After breakfast you will go to the territory of the**

Bogdinsko-Baskunchaksky nature reserve to see its main attractions: the unique salt Baskunchak lake and the Big Bogdo Mountain.

#### **First, you will take a walk on Baskunchak Lake. The basin**

of the lake is filled with salts and clay deposits of the Permian and Triassic periods, and also the rocks of the Quaternary age. Since the VIII century, the lake was used to extract salt and send it on the Silk Way. On the coast there are deposits of medicinal clays, and bathing in spring with a highly concentrated solution of salts has a curative effect.

#### **You will have lunch in a cafe in the village of Nizhny**

Baskunchak. After that, you will go to the Big Bogdo Mountain, which is the highest point of the Caspian lowland (150 m above sea level) and one of the most ancient mountains of the Astrakhan khanate. The mountain is composed of rocks 200-250 million years old.

### **Another unique feature of this mountain is that it**

continues to grow: its height increases by up to 2 mm per year. Also, Bogdo Mountain is the only place in Russia where the squeaky gecko lives – a rare species of lizard.

### **In the evening you will move to the park-hotel in the**

village of Kolkhoznaya Akhtuba. You will be accommodated in the rooms and have dinner in the cafe.

**The route length is 300 km.**

### **Day 6**

### **In the morning after breakfast you will be transferred to**

Volgograd. There you will visit the famous memorial "To the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad" on the Mamayev Kurgan. You will see the main sculpture of the ensemble "Motherland Calls" and the changing of the guard at the Hall of Military Glory.

### **You will also visit the museum-panorama "The Battle of**

Stalingrad", which is located near the central embankment of Volgograd. After lunch at the cafe, you will be taken to the airport for your departure flight.

## **Accommodation at the trip**

The first two nights of your trip you will spend in **a hotel in Elista**. It offers a restaurant, 24-hour reception, and free Wi-Fi. Your room will have one double or two single beds, air conditioning, a flat-screen TV with satellite channels, a refrigerator, a kettle and a bathroom with a shower, a hairdryer and toiletries.

On the third day, you will stay at **a hotel in Astrakhan** located in the historic city center. You will be accommodated in standard twin rooms with amenities. Your room will have two twin beds (transformable into one double if necessary), a flat-screen TV, Wi-Fi, air conditioning, a work desk, a refrigerator and a bathroom with a hairdryer. There are a gym, a restaurant, and a summer terrace with an outdoor cinema.

From the fourth to the fifth day of your trip, you will stay at **a hotel in Akhtubinsk**. Your room will have two separate beds, a flat-screen TV, a mini-fridge, air conditioning, an electric kettle, Wi-Fi, and a bathroom with a shower. The hotel has a cafe, billiard room and table tennis.

The final night of the tour you will spend in standard rooms at the **park hotel in the village of Kolkhoznaya Akhtuba** in the Volgograd region. Your room will have one double or two single beds, a refrigerator, TV, air conditioning, and a bathroom with a shower. The hotel has a restaurant, sports grounds, children's club, as well as a Russian sauna with a swimming pool and a SPA-complex.

**Note:** *hotels and bases along the route can be replaced by a similar level of service.*

## **FAQ**

Who will be my guide

Experienced guides will be with you throughout the tour.

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## Meals

The cost of the program includes three meals a day with elements of Kalmyk national cuisine, except for dinner on day 4. You will have breakfast and dinner at your accommodation, and lunch in a cafe or in nature during excursions and active routes.

## What to bring with you

- windproof and waterproof pants and hooded jacket
- long sleeve shirt
- lightweight shoes or sneakers
- first aid kit
- repellent
- personal hygiene products
- binoculars (to watch birds and saigas, optionally)

## Cost for groups of two or more people

For your group of two or more, we can do this trip on any other dates.

The cost will depend on the size of the group:

- 2 persons - 1620 euro/person
- 3 persons - 1130 euro/person
- 4 persons - 995 euro/person
- 5 persons - 960 euro/person
- 6 persons - 935 euro/person

# Booking

Kalmykia

## Treasures of the southern steppes

Difficulty



Group size

from 7 to 15

Duration

6 days

Accommodation at the trip



2 nights 3 nights

## from 690 EUR

### What's included in the price:

- double accommodation as per program
- breakfasts, lunches, and dinners (except for dinner on day 4)
- transfers from Elista airport and Volgograd airport
- transportation service per program
- guide and interpreting services
- camel riding
- all excursions and master-classes as per program
- entrance tickets and eco fees
- ethnic program in Adyk

### Extra charge:

- air tickets to Elista (from 68 EURO per person) and from Volgograd (from 71 EURO per person)
- dinner on day 4
- single room accommodation according to the program (+176 EURO per person)



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