

We are looking forward to meeting you in Russia soon. Before you depart please take the time to read the following. If anything remains in any way unclear, do let us know at any time.

Best wishes,

Koryo Tours

The following information is compiled by Koryo Tours



NOTES FOR TRAVELLERS

WELCOME!

Koryo Tours is very pleased to welcome you on the most unique journey of your life. The information included in this document below should assist you in preparing for the trip; please take the time to read it all thoroughly. It may be quite lengthy but we consider all information contained within to be important; also we hope that it will answer most of your questions and therefore save you a lot of time as you prepare for your trip. Don't hesitate to contact us if you require any clarification or further information.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Due to its remote location, unforgiving climate, and association with the Gulag system of Stalin's USSR, Magadan Province - in the far North East of Russia - has long been known as a place that few could, or would, visit. Until the foundation of the Province in 1953 the general name given to the area (still used today) was 'Kolyma' after the major river flowing through the area. Magadan and Kolyma became infamous bywords in the 1930s and 40s when Stalin sent hundreds of thousands of prisoners (both common and political) into the meat-grinder of the Gulag system, from which many were never to return. The incredible mineral wealth of Magadan combined with its near-perpetual winters made encouraging people to go there in sufficient numbers to extract large amounts of treasure from the ground very difficult. Until deportations from the 'mainland' began the region's main population had been the native tribes (Evenki, Koryaks, Chuvans, etc) and some hardy pioneers from the west, trading mostly in furs and gold. This was all to change when the Gulag arrived; forced labour in huge numbers made mining in this area instantly viable and soon all manner of material extracted from the ground by prisoners was being sent to the rest of Russia. Gold, silver, tin, uranium, all were found in abundance and all were able to be mined without the inconvenience and cost of having to pay the miners. The full brutal extent of the system was unknown in the west, and indeed to many in the USSR too. In 1944 the US Vice President Henry Wallace visited Magadan and was duped into the impression that workers were well-treated and fairly paid, claims he repeated in the US Senate when he returned to the States. Stalin's death in 1953 saw the beginning of the end for the Kolyma Gulag; gradually prisoners were amnestied or released at the end of their sentences.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 brought independence to some of the far-flung republics in the Soviet Union but Magadan, not associated with a specific ethnic group, remained a part of the Russian Federation. Its north-easternmost part seceded into its own administrative republic (still as a part of Russia though) known as Chukotka, and now Magadan Oblast (province) boasts a mere 150,000 people (100,000 of which live in Magadan city, one of only 2 main settlements in the entire province). Abandoned villages, towns, and factories litter the area visibly showing the shrinking population (due to emigration to less harsh parts of Russia).

Today the main industries of Magadan remain as they were during the most difficult years; gold, silver, tin, and ferrous metals in general. In addition Magadan has a large fish-catching and processing industry and remains a paradise for hunters, both commercial and casual – with bears being particularly prevalent.

Today's Magadan is a fascinating mix of crumbling Soviet-era towns and factories since abandoned by their occupants, a hardy population clinging on to life in one of the world's toughest areas, and a vast area of absolutely stunning wilderness full of mountains, rivers rich in all manner of fish, an almost total lack of people in most parts of the region making it a stark and wondrous place to visit. Juxtaposing the tragic history of how most people who have ever been there arrived and lived there with some of the most amazing landscapes that can be seen anywhere as well as exploring empty towns that give a post-apocalyptic feeling for any visitor. Truly a stunning and unique place to visit.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Locals claim that Kolyma 'has 12 months of winter, but the rest of the time is glorious summer!' and they are not far wrong! Deepest winter in Magadan sees temperatures drop severely to around minus 50 degrees centigrade and several metres of snowfall which is rarely cleared outside of the one or two main urban areas, making travelling around the region very troublesome indeed.

The short summer sees greenery explode and the rivers fill with melted water, trees here are not viable as timber - due to their very short growing season they tend to be very thin - but animal life abounds in the woods and rivers. Our tour takes place in July, the short summer in this region, but summer here can be very different to what people are used to elsewhere! Although sunny, the temperatures can drop especially at night so a range of clothes is advisable to be ready for any situation. At the beach the locals take every advantage of the sun to get into their tiniest bathing suit, but the water usually remains empty of people due to its residual very low temperature. Rain is possible at all times but perhaps the biggest irritant of the brief non-winter is mosquitoes – they are simply everywhere and not much can be done about them. All travellers are very strongly advised to bring a good quantity of the strongest mosquito repellent they can find, long sleeves and trousers (not linen), and a hat with a mosquito net are good ideas when travelling outside of Magadan city too – please don't underestimate these beasts – take precautions and bring protection from them – it's essential for this trip.

If you forget to bring any items of clothing that you find you may need then it is possible to visit local shops and markets to buy anything you need, the quality and range may not be what you are used to but sizes should be no problem and things can be bought at a reasonable price in most cases

For more detailed weather forecasting and other information, check www.wunderground.com

DOCUMENTATION NEEDED TO TRAVEL TO RUSSIA

You will require a passport valid for at least six months after the date of your trip. A valid Russian visa which you will have collected by the time you travel there. It is worthwhile having a copy of your tourist voucher (the supporting document for the visa) with you too.

BAGGAGE AND FLIGHTS

Most flights into Russia allow economy class passengers to check in 20kg plus one carry-on bag. Airlines are quite diligent about charging passengers for overweight luggage and it is important to note that most airports in Russia are quite strict on this and charging passengers for excess baggage even one or two kg over the limit is not at all unusual so do pack light if you plan to add to your luggage when on the trip. Russian passengers almost always wrap their bags in layers of tape or cling-film, either at home, or at the airport, if you choose to do this too then be aware that charges vary at airports but usually expect to pay \$10+ for wrapping. It isn't really necessary but for some reason everyone does it. Do lock your bag though. Security in Russian airports can be very tight; you must

pack liquids, knives, etc in the checked baggage.

SECURITY AND CRIME

Petty crime is a problem in Russia. This isn't to say that you need to be fearful when there, just be aware of where you are and what is going on around you. Local people's reputation for drinking is well-deserved and with this comes all the usual problems associated with vast amounts of alcohol consumption. So try to avoid being in situations where you may feel uncomfortable. In fact Russians are generally very hospitable people and will often try to buy drinks for foreigners in bars, share what they have with you, etc. But do be aware that annoyances like pick-pocketing, prostitution, etc do exist in bars and nightclubs across the country. Russian Mafia exist in all cities across the country but usually will not be bothered with foreign tourists as there is no benefit in bothering visitors, so this is not something to be very concerned about. When going out at night on foot it is better not to go alone, however the danger here is not acute but it is better to err on the safe side every time. It always pays to be careful when you are travelling especially in cities. Do not carry large amounts of money around. Always lock room doors.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

The most common problem experienced by travellers in Russia is a stomach upset or hangover! We recommend you pack your own anti-diarrheal medications and any other personal products you think you might need. There are chemists and drugstores to be found easily in any urban areas, that sell Imodium etc but it is of course a good idea to have this with you already. It is a good idea to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case your diarrhoea turns out to be bacterial in nature, or you sustain an infection of some kind.

We also recommend you bring a duplicate supply of any prescription drugs you regularly take, and keep them separately from the main supply in case of loss.

INSURANCE

Medical, Accident and Emergency Evacuation Insurance

Before travelling with Koryo Tours you must take out travel insurance to cover medical and evacuation costs. Koryo Tours cannot be held liable for any medical costs whatsoever. Koryo Tours is able to sell coverage for the tour - please contact us or see the [Terms & Conditions page of our website](#) for details.

TRIP CANCELLATION

If the tour is cancelled by Koryo Tours or the Russian authorities, we refund all money received minus the bank transfer fee. If the tour is cancelled by the tourist, then our cancellation charges apply. For our full cancellation policy, please see our website.

CLOTHING

You can dress how you like in Russia, nothing will be frowned upon unless you enter an orthodox church (where conservative dress, head-covering for women, etc, is required). When we go deep into Magadan Province though it is worth noting a couple of points; there will be many mosquitoes at the gulag and in Kadykchan especially, a great many mosquitoes indeed. You will need mosquito repellent and clothes that protect you from bites (linen trousers are useless; they will bite right through them), we strongly recommend you try to find a hat which has a face net on it, yes you will look like a bee-keeper but you will be safe from bites in the face. Sturdy shoes are also needed in these areas as the walk around the gulag site is fairly strenuous and hilly. Clambering around in the abandoned city also calls for decent footwear as well.

BASIC PACKING LIST

- torch/flashlight – for the camping trip this will be very useful indeed!
- Imodium or charcoal tablets – some people have a bad reaction to food they are not used to
- digital camera memory – although you can buy more when you are there it is best to have more than enough; you may take more pictures than you expect
- a good supply of any prescription medicines you need
- spending money – the amount spent by tourists varies greatly so it is hard to suggest a specific amount. Only Russian Roubles will be accepted in most cases but it is easy to change money in many places and there are ATMs all over the country apart from in the most remote areas. Some meals are not included in

the program as per the itinerary and do note that Magadan can be a very expensive places due to being so remote, do bring more than you think you will need; you can always take it home again afterwards

- Russian Phrasebook – although English is widely spoken by young people in major cities don't expect this to be a common skill in some of the places we are going!
- hand sanitizing liquid – on occasion there may be no soap available
- pocket tissues - many public bathrooms don't have toilet paper, on the camping trip and in the abandoned city there are no bathrooms available at all
- Mosquito repellent – the strongest you can find, bring lots of it. Also some kind of cream/balm to relieve the itchiness of mosquito bites
- A Whistle – please bring one of these for when we visit Kadykchan in case you get lost or need to call for assistance

MONEY MATTERS

The national currency of Russia is the Rouble. This can be used by tourists and is accepted anywhere, although it can be hard to buy outside of the country. Dollars and Euros can be changed in banks and at exchange points which can be found easily in Magadan city There are ATMs in some towns along the road as well. Do note that you may need to inform your bank that you are going to Russia to make sure that they do not block your card from working on the trip (this has happened before). It is a very good idea to bring crisp, clean, undamaged bills if bringing cash to exchange; dirty, ripped, or old notes may be rejected. Credit cards can be used in some places. Travellers' cheques are not very common in this area.

COSTS IN ADDITION TO THE TOUR FEE

On this tour, in addition to the tour fee and the plane ticket and visa fee, the extra costs you will have are as follows:

- Buying meals not included on the itinerary, buying drinks to go with meals included on the itinerary (other than water and tea/coffee)
- Tip for local guide & driver (recommended daily rate \$10 - \$20 per tour participant, plus a tip for the drivers taking us to the gulag and abandoned city we suggest \$10 per person per day additionally)
- Tipping is common in restaurants so do leave a little gratuity after a meal if you feel it was good enough, 5% is a reasonable tip in Russia
- Money for souvenirs, gifts, etc
- Entertainment expenses ex-itinerary

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bring plenty of memory for your camera as you will take more photos than you expect, especially in the gulag and in Kadykchan video cameras are allowed too.

In some parts of Magadan you need to be careful with the cameras. For example we will visit the Lenin statue in Magadan but one of the buildings next to this statue is the headquarters of the local FSB (formerly known as the KGB), you are not supposed to take pictures if this building. Other than this there is generally nowhere that you cannot take pictures (other than inside certain nightspots). When taking photos of local people though it is better to ask their permission first of course.

Several museums in Russia have kept alive the old Soviet system of charging a camera fee if people want to take pictures inside; this can vary from \$1 - \$5 and sometimes collective bargaining for the group is possible.

FOOD/WATER PRECAUTIONS

We do our best to ensure the highest level of cleanliness at all of the hotels we use, but it pays to be prudent. The following are some reminders to help you stay healthy. Note that these are recommendations; the food in Russia is generally clean and perfectly safe to eat:

Avoid

- **Tap water** (it is best to consume only bottled water)
- **Ice** (freezing does not disinfect water)
- **Milk** (unless it has been boiled or comes out of a can)
- **Uncooked vegetables**
- **Fruit** (if not peeled by you)

- **Home-made liquor**

Safe Foods and Beverages

- **Bottled water**
- **Carbonated soft drinks**
- **Hot tea or coffee**
- **Cheese** (if the outside has been peeled or it is in a sealed package)
- **Fruit** (if peeled by you)
- **Vegetables** (if thoroughly cooked)
- **Beer or commercially-produced liquors**

FOOD

Please let us know if you are a vegetarian or have any specific food allergies or issues. We will inform the local partners and accommodations will be made. While vegetarianism isn't common in Russia it is known and understood (our guide for the trip is a vegetarian actually) so this isn't a problem. Alcohol is available everywhere (it is Russia after all!) but is not included in the meals so if you want to have a drink it is entirely up to you. While Russians are known for hard drinking it is also quite common to be teetotal there and the ruinous effects of too much of the stuff are well-recognised, so don't feel in any way bad about turning down a drink at any time

GETTING AROUND IN FREE TIME

On this tour you will have some free time to explore Magadan at your leisure. It is safe to walk around and as we visit in the height of summer there are only a couple of hours of darkness. Still please be very aware that you are still in Russia; people wander around drunk, youths can be rowdy and cause problems. However there is no more danger here than the average western small city. Just be careful, don't flash cash around, don't argue with anyone who has been drinking, etc.

For nightlife there are a few bars and nightclubs that are very conveniently located, some places have English menus and some staff understand the language to various levels too but if no English is spoken then a bit of pointing and gesturing is usually enough to get what you want.

Hotel staff can call a taxi at any time and these are cheap and efficient.

Magadan also has *banyas* that you may wish to visit, this is a kind of Russian sauna, you rent the whole place (it is not a public sauna, there are those too though) and these usually have cold pools, steam rooms, and many other facilities. These places are usually hired by the hour and it is worth calling ahead. Our local partners can make recommendations about such places.

As is common across the former USSR, hailing a taxi generally means something more akin to hitching; standing on the street and waving at cars until one stops and gives you a lift, in exchange for some money. They may seem very dodgy but it is a common way to get around. We can't professionally recommend it though unless you are feeling confident that you know what you are doing. It is only a little more time and money to have a car arranged for you which would probably make you feel more comfortable and secure, just be aware that if someone suggests flagging down a taxi that this is probably what they are referring to. If you do take this option then negotiate the fare in advance with the driver, and don't be afraid to wave off any car you don't like the look of, or one where the driver charges too much, this is common practice. As is picking up other passengers along the way (it's basically how drivers make extra cash; cruising around giving people lifts to places)

MAIL

Postcards are usually available at bookshops, souvenir shops, hotels, and post offices. These can be sent from the local post office. Mail usually takes two to three weeks to reach the U.S. or Europe.

TELEPHONE

Your mobile phone provider may offer roaming services in Russia but this can be expensive. You would be best advised to buy a local SIM card from one of the main domestic providers (MTC, Megafon, Beeline) but be sure to get one that covers the whole of Russia. Note that you will have no coverage in the most remote parts of Magadan Province at all.

INTERNET AND EMAIL

As with most countries decent hotels have wifi available for customers – the quality and speed can be not as good as you hope for but it will work in the end. Many bars, cafes, etc also have wifi so there are various options available. When we stay overnight in Susuman on our way to and from Kadykchan there will be no internet access;

the hotel in this city has no service and there are no internet cafes in this area. Kadykchan itself was abandoned long before internet was available in this part of the world, and in Ust-Nera you should expect to be offline as well. – We would recommend buying a 3G SIM card when you arrive in Russia so you have internet on your phone in some areas even when there is no wifi available.

SHOPPING

SHOPPING IN MAGADAN

Due to its remote situation thousands of kilometres from the nearest railway terminus Magadan imports most things sold in the city, including food, drinks, and consumer goods meaning that prices here are very high in comparison to Vladivostok. Gold shops are common in the city and sell necklaces, rings, bracelets etc made of locally mined gold (not mined by prisoners these days!) but with gold prices currently very high this is far from a cheap souvenir. Trinkets such as key rings, pens, drinking glasses, etc with the regional flag or other Magadan logos can be found at a souvenir shop about 2 mins walk from the hotel, and we can arrange a visit to see the workshop of a man who makes carvings from mammoth ivory (not illegal incidentally, the animals have been dead for tens of thousands of years, people mine for ivory in Magadan!) and even walrus penis – these sculptures can be purchased, price depends on size and complexity. Some T-shirts can be found at the airport shops and also at souvenir shops in the city, these make for a unique souvenir – not many people have one from Magadan after all!

'SHOPPING' IN KADYKCHAN

Due to a complete lack of population and any utilities there are no shops in Kadykchan, just the remnants of shops that have been abandoned. In fact there are no shops for many kilometres around. We will take a packed lunch with us to this site but if you need snacks, alcoholic drinks, etc then you should stock up in Susuman before we head off to Kadykchan.

The lack of shops however doesn't mean that you won't get any souvenirs here; the city lends itself to plunder very easily; street signs, license plates, schoolbooks, official documents, etc litter the place. These belong to nobody now so as long as you are safe and responsible, we see nothing wrong in helping yourself to some souvenirs here, just leave the damaged Lenin bust in the centre of town alone!

SLEEPING

Magadan – Our hotel is in the centre of town, an excellent location and from here it's very easy to get around the city. The staff don't speak much English but they can be helpful in ordering taxis, giving local advice and so on. There is a bar in the hotel (you usually get a voucher for a free drink when you check in) and a souvenir shop too. The rooms are kept clean and you'll find this a decent place to stay

Dneprovsky – Former gulag camp deep in the forests of Magadan. Here our crew will pitch the tents and we will take a guided walk around the site. This walk can be as strenuous as you like, but be warned that the slopes are steep, the ground unsure, and if you're not feeling fit enough to make it then please let the guide know as you can be escorted back to camp at any time. The Gulag system was not known for its comfort-levels and this night will be one of basic facilities; tents and a cooked meal prepared by our team on the spot. There are no bathrooms in this place, but there is a small stream running next to the camp site where fresh water can be obtained. We will be roughing it a bit but that is the nature of camping, and it will of course be in more comfort than the vast majority of people who have ever spent time in this dark and fascinating place

Sinegorye – This is a very small settlement and the options for places to stay are commensurately limited, so we stay in the only hotel in town (it's the wild east after all!) which is actually a working sanatorium. So there are a few medical procedures that can be tried if you dare! Sinegorye Hotel is basic but has provide beds, hot water, and all the things you need for a night!

Susuman – this is the nearest larger settlement to Kadykchan and was once served by an airport (now closed), there are no real hotels in Susuman so we stay at a guesthouse run by a local factory. There is hot water and a relatively decent level of comfort. The rooms are in a local apartment block, an interesting place to stay, and very close to the small town centre. The occupancy levels in Susuman have largely collapsed along with the rest of the region, but a stubborn local population does cling on here, for how much longer its unclear. This is what it looks like when a town is left behind and slowly abandoned

Kadykchan – And this is what it looks like when the process is complete and everyone has left. Kadykchan has a post-apocalyptic vibe and is a genuinely amazing place. We intend to camp here over night as per the itinerary, staying in an apartment (there are thousands of them after all, all empty. But there is no plumbing, no home-comforts, nothing in fact here. It's basically sleeping rough (we will have the sleeping bags, mats etc. from the night at the gulag still. If this seems daunting then please let us know in advance and accommodations can be made to room anyone who doesn't want to stay overnight in Kadykchan in Susuman again – **NOTE:** We would appreciate you confirming if you intend to spend the night sleeping in Kadykchan or would prefer to return to Susuman at least 2 weeks before the tour please

IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS

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Kadykchan City, Magadan Province – Abandoned since the late 1990s