

KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY

These notes will give you a brief idea of what you may experience on this new and remote voyage. Our emphasis is on exploring pristine landscapes, unique wildlife encounters and learning about the fascinating geology that has shaped this region. However we stress that this is an expedition style cruise. Our adventures and daily program may be influenced by the changeable weather and sea conditions of the region. The Kuril Islands in particular is famous for foggy conditions and we expect many itinerary changes as a result. We'll delight in taking advantage of these spontaneous opportunities and there is always an element of the unexpected. We ask you to join us in the spirit of expedition cruising as we discover this extraordinary region with you.

Our journey is a ship-based exploration of the Kuril Island chain and the southern reaches of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The spectacular terrain combined with a lack of suitable infrastructure makes travel to most areas difficult except by sea. We believe travel by expedition ship is the safest, most efficient and enjoyable way to unlock the secrets of one of the world's great wilderness frontiers.

Using our mothership as a floating base camp, we hope to paddle two times a day, spending as much time on the water as possible. We will normally leave the ship immediately after breakfast for the first paddle of the day, and then often after lunch we will have time for a second paddle before returning to the ship for dinner. Most paddles range from two to four hours. We endeavour to have at least one extended paddle where we are away from the ship for most of the day. The flexibility of kayaking with a small private group ensures our own unique experiences, quite different from those encountered by the other passengers on board. However, we have the option to forego paddling and join the other passengers for shore excursions or zodiac cruises on any given day.

Our journey begins in Korsakov, located at the southern tip of Sakhalin, Russia. This offers us easy access to the geological forms that will dominate our adventures along the 'ring of fire'. The Kuril Islands, often shrouded in fog, have a charm all of their own. Lying like giant, volcanic stepping-stones between Hokkaido and Kamchatka, the Kurils divide the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean. Ownership of these mysterious islands is still hotly contested between the Pacific powers of Russia and Japan. In Soviet times Russia maintained a military presence on many of the islands and entry to anyone else was strictly forbidden. Strangely enough this has been a great boon for the wildlife, particularly marine creatures, which were protected from hunters and fishermen. Consequently there is an abundance of seabirds, including guillemots, kittiwakes, cormorants and the magnificent, endangered Steller's sea eagle. The waters are rich with life, including copious quantities of fish and marine mammals such as orca and minke whales, a variety of dolphins, sea otters, sea lions and fur seals.

Until 1990 foreigners were forbidden entry to Kamchatka and even Russians needed to jump through a daunting series of bureaucratic hoops to get there. Kamchatka is a spectacular world of turbulent rivers, towering volcanoes, hot springs and snow, taiga and tundra, wild animals and friendly people. Summer's warmth fosters the growth of a profusion of wildflowers and spreads dappled light through magnificent birch, larch, fir and poplar forests. In summer spawning salmon run upstream, much to the delight of the world's largest brown bears, ravenous from months of winter hibernation.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

To ensure you have safe, enjoyable paddles you should be of an intermediate standard and have an adventurous attitude. This should not be your first sea kayaking experience. You do not need to be an expert or know how to roll. However, you should have practiced a wet exit and assisted re-entry before the trip, and recognize that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. You need to be comfortable putting spray skirts on, ferry gliding and have practiced support strokes. We have very little opportunity for instruction before we commence paddling, so we highly recommend that you have done some kayaking recently and in a variety of conditions.

Try to rent a kayak locally before leaving home if you would like some additional experience, or seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. We often begin our first paddling session from the shore and after that will be launching directly from the ship so you should be comfortable paddling on seas that could have up to a 1 metre swell and some current. The water surface will vary from calm to wind chop. Your guide will assess

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your ability on the initial paddle and, if you have insufficient experience, he or she may not allow you to participate in rougher conditions. Our paddling excursions will not involve camping out.

We'd be happy to talk to you about your ability, and may be able to advise you how to obtain the necessary experience before your trip. Paddling numbers are limited and berths fill fast so it is essential you book early.

Please Note: Along with your voyage booking form we require all participants to complete our "Sea Kayak Booking and Experience Form" and return it to us immediately to secure your spot in the sea kayaking group.

ITINERARY – KURIL ISLANDS & KAMCHATKA (Korsakov to Petrapavlosk)

Day 1 Sakhalin Island, Russia

Our voyage departs from the port town of Korsakov, located at the southern tip of Sakhalin. In the late afternoon, our fine Russian officers and crew welcome us onboard Marina Svetaeva as we set sail into the Pacific Ocean.

Day 2 & 3 – Kunashir Island

We make our way to Kunashir, southernmost of the Kuril Islands and still claimed by Japan. We aim to visit the hot springs at Cape Stolbchaty, a geological wonder of striated rock intrusions and an example of the constant volcanic forces that have shaped these islands. The northern reaches of the island are part of the Kurilsky Nature Reserve. Located at the base of Tyatya, a spectacular active volcano with a picture-perfect cone, this reserve is home to a rich diversity of wildlife, including the majority of Kunashir's brown bear population. Paddling along the coast, we explore the numerous bays that offer superb exploring both onshore and on the water. Here we find Kuril bamboo growing amidst stone birch trees, tundra slopes covered with colourful splashes of wildflowers backed by smoking volcanoes.

Day 4 – Iturup Island

The largest island of the Kuril chain, we hope to paddle and make some landings along the little-visited shores of Iturup today. Weather permitting, we plan to visit the spectacular caldera of Lion's Mouth Bay. The vast bay is almost completely encircled by the rim of a now extinct volcano, in some places rising 500 metres straight out of the water. The nutrient-rich waters surrounding Iturup Island are home to over 20 species of marine mammals, with Dall's porpoises and the Pacific white-sided dolphin commonly seen here.

Days 5-9 – Central Kuril Islands

Our itinerary is now completely in the hands of the weather gods. There is a wealth of possible landings and we will choose those that best suit the prevailing conditions – we expect to encounter much fog and grey skies during our time in the Kuril's. We plan to make many kayak excursions and these may include: Brat Chirpoi with its beautiful cliffs of nesting seabirds and large sea otter colonies; the spectacular volcanic island of Ketoi; the dramatic cliff line of Broutona, home to thousands of guillemots, kittiwakes, tufted puffins and auklets; the magnificent emerald green caldera of Yankicha; Skaly Lovushky and its boisterous Steller's sea lion colony; or beachcombing along the black sand beaches of Onekotan.

Day 10 – Paramushir & Atlasova Islands

Today we hope to paddle the shores of Paramushir Island and indulge in a cliff-top hike, where we will notice the distinct change in vegetation from the more southern Kuril islands. Five of Paramushir's twenty volcanos are still active and we aim to walk among spongy tundra and wildflowers for better views of this picturesque island. A birdwatchers paradise, during our walks we may see among others Siberian rubythroat, rough legged buzzard, snow bunting and the exquisite harlequin duck.

This afternoon we hope to land at the majestic island of Atlasova. Made up of a single active volcano rising dramatically over 2300 metres straight out of the water, this is one of the most beautiful of the Kuril Islands. We may explore the ruins of a Soviet-era labour camp onshore, cruise around the kelp filled bays of the island or have a closer inspection of the impressive layered deposit of compacted volcanic ash. If conditions allow, we may have the chance to explore the small specks of rock known as the Ptichy (Bird) Islands. Home to prolific number of birds including pigeon guillemots, tufted puffins, common murre and black-legged kittiwakes, the islands also support healthy numbers of sea otters and harbour seals.

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Day 11 – West Kamchatka Coast

Today we aim to explore the south-west coast of the Kamchatka peninsula. We may paddle around the cliffs at Cape Kambalny and walk through the colourful birch forests and tall grasslands that characterise this region. This will be our first chance to view the famous volcanoes of Kamchatka. One of the most geologically active areas on the planet, the Kamchatka Peninsula features over 300 volcanoes, 29 of which are still active.

Days 12 & 13 – East Kamchatka Coast

We cruise north along the impressive mountain range of the east Kamchatka coast to Vestnik Bay. Both ashore and from the ship we'll see snow-capped volcanoes, waterfalls and plenty of marine life. We hope to visit Utashud Island, where we can observe delightful, entertaining sea otters as they go about their business and numerous seabirds such as horned puffins nesting among the sea stacks. This little-visited coastline is a favourite haunt of the rare Steller's Sea Eagle and to large brown bears, the undisputed master of the region.

Day 14 – Petropavlovsk

This morning we dock early at Petropavlovsk, situated on the shores of Avacha Bay below a backdrop of snowy volcanic peaks. This is a fantastic base for exploring the wilds of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Our adventure ends today, with transfers to the airport to connect with your onward flights.

Please see our Kamchatka Options leaflet if you'd like to spend more time exploring the wonders of the Russian Far East before returning home.

GENERAL INFORMATION

HIGHLIGHTS OF KURIL ISLANDS & KAMCHATKA

- Travelling to a remote and unexplored part of the world.
- Island hopping among a scenically diverse chain of volcanic islands with a wide range of habitats including tundra, birch forests, dramatic cliffs, calderas and black sand beaches.
- A wide variety of wildlife – prolific birdlife (puffins, auklets, kittiwakes, rubythroats, Steller's sea eagle), dolphins, whales and the chance of seeing the rare Kamchatka brown bear.
- Learning about volcanoes and geothermal activity.

This Tour Includes

- Ship's accommodation. All public areas are open to all passengers.
- All meals on board ship.
- All shore excursions from the ship including Zodaics excursions.
- Lectures, videos, slide and film shows and guide services.
- Medical services. There is a resident medical officer and well equipped clinic on board.
- Port taxes, port charges and landing fees imposed by government authorities.
- Kayak guide, kayaks, paddling and rescue equipment.

This Tour Does Not Include

- Air transport and airport transfers before and after the cruise
- Excess baggage on any air flights.
- Visa, passport and vaccination charges and airport departure taxes.
- Hotels and meals not included in ship cruise itinerary.
- Tips on board for crew and service personnel.
- Optional excursions not included in ship cruise itinerary such as helicopter flight.
- Laundry, postage, personal clothing, medical expenses, personal travel insurance and items of a personal nature such as bar charges, wine and phone calls.
- Emergency evacuation charges.

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