



Saiga Conservation Alliance: Tour 2011

Country of the Saiga

Wildlife and Cultures of the Southern Russian Steppe



Monday 29th August - Wednesday 7th September 2011

The vast steppes of Southwest Russia, stretching from the Black Sea in the west to the shores of the Caspian Sea in the east, are home to some of Europe's richest natural and cultural history. Few outside of the region are aware of the diverse and extraordinary ecosystems and cultures which thrive here, fewer still have visited.

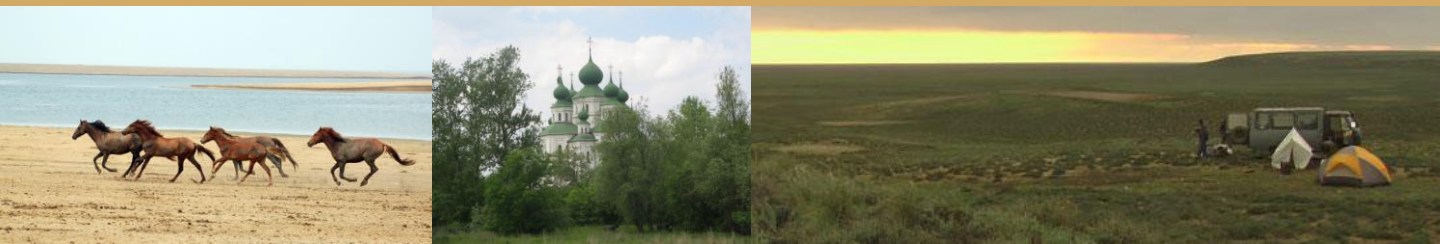
The Saiga Conservation Alliance invite you to join us and experience this exciting region first-hand on a 10-day tour: journeying from the rich grasslands of the steppe, through arid semi-desert towards the Caspian, to the lush subtropical wetlands and spectacular birdlife of the Volga Delta, we will discover its diverse fauna and flora and meet the warm people who inhabit it.

Taking in the historic city of Astrakhan, former capital of the Tatar Khanate of Astrakhan, and the Republic of Kalmykia, the only official Tibetan Buddhist state in Europe, this tour will experience the fascinating history and varied peoples of the steppe.

The pre-Caspian steppe is also one of the few places in the world where the Critically Endangered saiga antelope can be seen in large numbers, and this is the only tour that allows you to meet the committed conservationists who are working to save it. By joining this tour you are directly helping to support their work.

A 10-day tour arranged by Saga Voyages

FOR BOOKING INFO CONTACT: MAIL@SAIGA-CONSERVATION.COM



SCA Tour 2011

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ITINERARY

DAY 1 – Fly London Heathrow (or UK regional airports) to Rostov-on-Don on British Airways via Moscow, arriving in the evening.

DAY 2 – Morning sightseeing tour in historic Rostov-on-Don. After lunch we head east for the UNESCO-listed Rostov Biosphere Reserve, visiting the Centre for Rare Animals in Khutor en route.

DAY 3 – Full day exploring Rostov Reserve. The reserve combines a pristine example of the flora and fauna of the Eurasian steppe prior to human intervention with a unique saline and salt-marsh ecosystem, and forms part of one of Eurasia's biggest flyways for migrating birds.

DAY 4 – Departure for Elista, capital of the Republic of Kalmykia. The Kalmyks, who migrated to Russia from China in the 17th century, are of Mongolian origin and practice Tibetan Buddhism. We visit the huge Golden Temple in the centre of the city and the Geden Sheddup Choikorling Monastery outside, as well as the Museum of Natural History and the Memorial to the Deportation of the Kalmyk people after World War II. We also visit and stay at Chess City, built for the 33rd Chess Olympiad.

DAY 5 – A full day at the Centre for Wild Animals in Yashkul. The Centre plays a pivotal role in saiga conservation in the region and maintains a large captive population of this threatened species. Afternoon - optional visit to a nearby lake, or a chance to stroll on the steppe. Evening entertainment of traditional Kalmyk songs and dance by local schoolchildren.

DAY 6 – Transfer to the magical Volga Delta region, a great contrast to the dry steppe, with its clear water and abundant wildlife. Stop at the village of Khulkhutta to see the memorial marking the Soviet-Nazi front in World War 2. Stay overnight in Liman village.

Day 7 - Full day exploring the Volga Delta, sailing as far as the Caspian shore to view the lotus blossoms and rich bird life. In the evening we return to Liman on the borders of Stepnoi nature reserve

DAY 8 – A full day exploring the wild steppe of Stepnoi with the reserve's rangers. The reserve is a haven for wildlife in the region, protecting saigas, birds of prey, reptiles and other steppe and desert flora and fauna. Return to Liman in the evening.

DAY 9 – Morning departure for Astrakhan, a former capital of the Khanate of Astrakhan and a pleasant city of canals and tree-lined streets. Visit the impressive Kremlin remains with the Cathedral of the Assumption and other buildings inside, as well as the old merchants' quarter and merchants' houses, the Tatar quarter and mosques, and some of the museums.

DAY 10 – After breakfast transfer to the airport for return flights to the UK via Moscow.

INFORMATION

TOUR PRICE: £975 (maximum – based on group size of 10) to £775 (minimum – based on group size of 20)

INCLUDED: all accommodation; airfares from Moscow to Rostov-on-Don and from Astrakhan to Moscow; all transfers and transportation; full board; all travel and stated excursions; all site and museum entries; the services of an English speaking guide; meet-and-greet service at the airport.

NOT INCLUDED: alcoholic beverages; laundry; incidentals; international flights to and from Moscow; insurance; visas.

ACCOMMODATION: Mostly good quality new and/or recently reconditioned hotels, with standard amenities and private facilities. Overnight at Rostov Biosphere Reserve and Centre for Wild Animals visitor centres with basic facilities.

TRAVEL: Air-conditioned coach throughout.

LOCAL CONDITIONS: The tour is not particularly strenuous but there are some large distances to be covered. Main roads are asphalt, although often fairly bumpy, and some reserve roads are just dirt tracks. Weather is expected to be warm to hot.

Please note tourism in this region is relatively new so service levels can vary and the unexpected often occurs - this, of course, can be part of the attraction!

SAGA VOYAGES: Award-winning tour company based in Rostov-on-Don: www.sagavoyages.ru

BOOKING: Contact mail@saiga-conservation.com for further information or visit www.saiga-conservation.com for additional contact details

