

A Pilgrimage (Seminar) into the Spiritual Center of St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg 2020

This tour will engage participants into a journey of Russian ancient art and history in the spiritual center of St. Petersburg. We will encounter lectures from various academicians, religious representatives in the Church and artists. The focus will explore Russia's past and present with a series of lectures speaking to the icon collection at the State Russian Museum. One cannot understand the Russian soul without knowing the Russian icon. In old Russia the icons were the most common form of figurative art; a visual demonstration of faith in love and charity. The icon on the cultural level is a storehouse of information exhibiting tensions of justice portraying Good over Evil. Through the icon, we can discover the complex and many-sided world of Russian history and culture, and the movements of art and tradition. A knowledge of iconography will help us to appreciate the complexities in the world of ideas which lie behind the icon, the profound spirituality of those depicted, and the historical links between medieval Russia and other countries.

The book about Pavel Florensky "The Aesthetic Face of Being- Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky" by Victor Bychkov (Russian Academy in Moscow) will be included in tour materials that either you will receive at our first tour meeting or will be mailed. Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) was one of the most profound theologians at the beginning of the 20th century; Russia's Silver Age. This book examines Florensky's preoccupation with the centrality of art, specifically classical iconography, for the meaning of man. As his work is arguably the basis and inspiration for the noted studies of Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi (1863-1920) who served to retrieve the art of iconography from its romantic, nineteenth-century deformations and restore it to its classical and canonical form. You will be provided with articles drawing from the philosophies of Trubetskoi and various Russian academicians including Alexei Lidov from the University of Moscow.

The book about Pavel Florensky will help you appreciate a lecture which will be delivered by Sergei Akopov, University of St. Petersburg, The Meaning of Russian Spirituality and Religiosity in their Development Through Centuries or, in other words, "What is the Russian Mind About" (a quote from the Russian poet Tyutchev as quoted from Tamara Mikhailova).

My mentor, Tamara Mikhailova, Smolny Institute University of St. Petersburg, is the driving force behind all the unique people contributing to the daily seminars. And through the 23 years that I have visited Russia, the idea that in Russia, words and symbols are more important than reality become the means by which I understand Russian life. Here again I quote a poem by the 19th century poet, Fyodor Tyutchev:

*Russia cannot be understood
With the mind,
Nor can she be measured
By a common yardstick.
A special character she has:
In Russia one can only have faith.*

Program: \$2,500 per person (includes air, hotel/ 7 night stay; Petro Palace Hotel, breakfast, State Russian Museum lectures and tour, lectures by university personnel, concert, day excursion/guided tour to Novgorod including lunch at a restaurant, celebratory dinner the night before departure, Russian invitation and airport transfers)

Travel insurance and Russian visa extra

Program at the State Russian Museum

Planned are the 4 study-visits (1.5-2 hours each) to the Department of Ancient Russian Art.

The total number of Ancient Russian artifacts exceeds 6000 in the Museum. The number of exhibition halls 4. The most important art objects are organized by schools, topographically and chronologically according to the centers of icon painting: such as ancient Byzantium and Kyivan Rus; Novgorod and Pskov, Moscow and the Russian North(Ferapontovo) and by the time of their creation.

In the Museum the lectures will be organized in the halls (1-4),not only by the schools but by the genres and subjects of the icons. A tour of the museum will take place.

Day 1

About the origin of icons (in general) and centers where they were created. Monasteries as centers of icon painting. How the icons were created. Most famous Russian icon painters.

The oldest icons in the collection: Archangel with the Golden Hair, Eleussa Mother of God; iconographic types of the image of the Mother of God, The Savior and the Russian Saints.

Day 2

Icons of the Novgorodian and Pskovian schools. Icons as a reflection of history. How Christianity was adopted; the story of the choice of faith. The Russian concept of the Beautiful. Russian saints and their images.

Day 3

Icons of the Moscow school. The great Russian icon painters in the Russian Museum. Works of the Rublev School, Theophanes the Greek and Dionysius.

Day 4

Icons of the 17th century. Why were the icons originally not signed? When did the first signed icons appear. Patrons and collectors of Ancient Russian art. The Botkin collection.

Site visits included in the package price:

Visit to the Icon Painting School at St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra/ a social meeting of the iconographers and a tour of the art/liturgical collection at the Lavra.

Symphony at the St. Petersburg Cappella Hall

A tour of the Kazan Cathedral and St. Isaac's as the biggest depositories of religious artifacts as a preamble and a background to the lecture program.

Novgorod Day Excursion/ with a tour guide (included)

Novgorod is an ancient 9th century settlement and one of the oldest most prominent cities in Russia. Novgorod is a very important cultural and art center, came to be one of the most influential centers of iconography from the 12th-15th centuries and in its Kremlin houses one of the most important icon museums of local ancient Russian iconography. The day excursion includes bus transport, English speaking guides, admission to the museums of the Kremlin and yard of Yaroslav, Museum of the icon collection, St. George Monastery, Museum of Wooden Architecture and late lunch (early dinner) at a restaurant prior to departure.

Optional Visits to Religious Centers – only extra cost is transport and to pay an escort a daily fee divided among the number participating (Nadia and/or Natalya); resumes in the tour materials

St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra

St. Xenia of St. Petersburg Chapel and Tomb

St. John Convent

and more; some within walking distance from our hotel St. Isaac's (there is an admittance fee for St. Isaac's since it is a state museum), Kazan Cathedral, Church of Spilled Blood. We can attend services at any church/cathedral. Continual services take place at Kazan Cathedral.

Visit to Artists- only extra cost will be transportation; taxi, bus or metro

Vasily Bratanyuk- painter of historical religious scenes and religious sites

more to come...

Optional Visits (not included in the tour price; guided tour available)

Hermitage

Peterhoff

Catherine's Palace, Pavlovsk, Gatchina

Ballet/Mariinsky

The vastness of Russia's span is inconceivable to our minds, and it's economic and political future yet unknown to any authoritative prediction. St. Petersburg, in it's brilliant beauty, represents the meeting of Eastern and the Western culture; a storehouse of many treasures yet to be unveiled. Once visiting St. Petersburg, one will always be presented with an eternal desire to return! The restoration of St. Petersburg is moving forward with great momentum preserving the splendor of the city. Its lovely and fairy tale like palaces, it's hauntingly gleaming gold domes soaring above the clouds...constantly remind us that all lovers of beauty do have a stake in the survival of St. Petersburg and its place in the world....

Looking forward-

A future pilgrimage/tour anticipates a deeper theological, spiritual and artistic journey to the Solovetsky Archipelago Islands in the White Sea in northern Russia; the place where the communist Gulag was and today a symbol of a thriving monastery past and present gathering together the greatest of Russia's historical intellectuals and philosophers. It is the place where Fr. Pavel Florensky was executed.

Solovki Monastery is one of the most significant monastic institutions in Russia. Perhaps this pilgrimage will take place in 2021.

