

# LET'S RUSSIA.

Russian-raised **Bella Hill** at House of Travel Shirley shares her top tips for visiting this northern gem.

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## Russia? Sounds sort of ... cold.

It's not cold year-round! In fact, it's got four seasons, with great summer weather. From late May till end of July, St. Petersburg has "**white nights**" – meaning it doesn't get dark! Once you're there, you get to meet locals, eat delicious food and explore a completely new place – the reasons we all travel!



2

## What are amazing Russian foods?

I love sipping a traditional non-alcoholic fizzy Kvas on a hot day. You'll want to try Russian dumplings, **Shashlik**, which is Russian-style BBQ, and meat-filled pastries called **Chebureki**. And pies! There are so many: meat, potatoes and even beetroot tops with cheese – one of my favourites.

3

## What are the best ways to visit?

House of Travel offers a range of **small group tours**, which help visitors get the most from their experience. There's nothing like staying with a family to truly immerse, and some tours even include homestays. **Cruising** is also a fantastic choice.

4

## What are the unmissable experiences in Moscow and St. Petersburg?

So many things! One of my favourite places in Moscow is Arbat Street. It's elegant and historic, with lots of cafés and music.

St. Petersburg is the cultural capital of Russia. I highly recommend buying tickets to the opera or ballet. But I'd say the best thing in this city is free and under open sky – the city's stunning architecture. Take a walk or canal cruise on **Neva River** and see how the city was built to look like Venice. For art lovers, **the Hermitage Museum** is one of the oldest and best museums in the world! It sits inside the Winter Palace of Empress Catherine the Great – literally breath-taking.

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## Is it difficult to visit Siberia?

Siberia typically has short summers and long, brutally cold winters. It's got an infamous history: Prisoners were sent to remote penal colonies in vast uninhabited

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Saint Basil's Cathedral (top) towers over Moscow's Red Square. The city's metro stations (right) are unique: The most beautiful are decorated with frescoes, marble columns and ornate chandeliers. In St. Petersburg, the Hermitage Museum houses art treasures (above).



## TIP SHEET



By **BELLA HILL**,  
House of Travel  
Shirley

### GETTING THERE.

Via Dubai, Doha, Seoul, Singapore and other gateways in about 26 hours.

**VISAS.** NZ passport holders require a pre-arranged visa.

**DINING OUT.** Meals usually cost \$10 to \$20 (800 to 1500 rubles), and a coffee or local beer just about \$2 (95 rubles).



## SIGHTS FROM SHIPS

# Seeing Russia by cruise.

By **JEFF LECKEY**, House of Travel



**Ocean cruising in the Baltic Sea.** These cruises sample the best of Scandinavia along with a taste of Russia. If you choose a **7-night Baltic cruise**, you'll usually get just one day in St. Petersburg – and that will definitely leave you wanting more! Longer itineraries include two or three nights in the city, giving you a chance to see so much more.

**Russia by river cruise.** River cruises really immerse in Russia. Being based on the ship means unpacking just once while visiting many places – totally relaxing! **Volga River** sailings pass through breath-taking locks and huge inland seas so vast you'd swear they were open ocean.

**Highlights by cruise.** I really recommend the **Evening Illuminations Tour in Moscow** – the city truly sparkles at night. **Kizhi Island** is a time capsule of historic wooden Russian buildings – There's nothing like it anywhere else! **Mandrogny village** is a delight to behold, an open air museum featuring Russian traditions and crafts. With at least four days in **St. Petersburg**, you'll get to see all the amazing sights and like us, maybe take in a performance by a renowned Russian ballet.

**Top tip.** When your ocean cruise includes St. Petersburg, New Zealand passport holders won't need a **Russian Visa** to participate in cruise line excursions. For river cruises, your House of Travel consultant will obtain a visa letter for you when you book. ■

### BY RIVER | Volga River



Sail from St. Petersburg to Moscow in about 8 to 12 days and call in at small villages and ancient cities in between.

### BY OCEAN | Baltic Sea



Most Baltic cruises begin in St. Petersburg before visiting Germany and exploring highlights of Norway.



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areas of Siberia. Today the nicest way to see Siberia is by rail journey aboard the Trans-Siberian or Trans-Mongolian railways – You'll cover vast distances and meet locals in a comfortably cosy space.

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**Will House of Travel arrange my visa?**

Yes – we have all the contacts! Like with all the holidays we plan, we have your back.

7

**Besides Moscow and St. Petersburg, what do you most recommend?**

There are few places in the world as fascinating as **Kamchatka**. On a vast volcanic peninsula that's almost entirely wilderness, it's a place of extraordinary primal beauty, rushing rivers, hot springs and snow-capped peaks.

The **South of Russia** is known for warm hospitality and rich culture – My Kiwi husband had to deal with all our traditions before he was allowed to take me away.

I was born in **Georgia** and I love it! For years we'd return for summer holidays by the Black Sea. Not many Kiwis have discovered Georgia, so if you want something off the beaten track, it's perfect. I highly recommend visiting capital city **Tbilisi** and the surrounding countryside.



Visit remote Siberia (above) by train during its warm summer months, when the sun shines nearly round the clock. Russian food like Borscht (below left) is hearty and warming – the perfect fuel for exploring stunning palaces and cathedrals like the one in Diveevo (bottom left).



8

**What makes you especially proud of being Russian?**

I think when you come from a diverse culture you have better understanding of other people's values, no matter where they come from. I love having the ability to speak multiple languages and recognising traditions and appreciating everyday life.

9

**What's the top tip you'd give travellers to Russia?**

Be open minded. Try to make friends with locals and they will go over and beyond to please you. ■

# Where to walk the world.

Six spectacular spots for putting one foot in front of the other.



Recommended by  
**CAROL SUTTON**  
HOUSE OF TRAVEL MATAMATA

## Burguret Route on Mt Kenya

KENYA | 6 DAYS | 76kms



DIFFICULTY ●●●●○

While Mt Kilimanjaro usually steals the East African spotlight, trampers rate the stunning scenery and lack of crowds on Mt Kenya. **We recommend the wilder and less travelled Burguret route to Point Lenana.** Then head back toward hot showers along the Chogoria Route. Bonus? The mountain is surrounded by a national park: Spot a herd of elephants or buffalo from your hard-won vantage point.

## Murray River

AUSTRALIA | 3-4 DAYS | 41kms



DIFFICULTY ●○○○○

One of Australia's Great Walks, the Murray River Walk is a beautiful ramble along the famous river. We recommend the guided experience, **which includes a peaceful river cruise for an unmatched escape into nature.** Walk three days, staying at cosy lodges, then hop on a boat to reach the state border (and celebrate with well-deserved lunch at Wilkadene Woolshed Brewery).

## Camino de Santiago

FRANCE & SPAIN | 30-35 DAYS | 800kms



DIFFICULTY ●●●○○

These tracks are the work of Medieval Catholic pilgrims from across Europe, all heading to the holy city of Santiago de Compostela. Retrace their steps by walking the Camino Francés (the French Way) from St. Jean Pied-du-Port in France **across the Pyrenees and into Spain**, where locals love welcoming trekkers. The best part might be the cameradie you find along the way.

## Torres del Paine W Trek

CHILE | 5 DAYS | 80kms



DIFFICULTY ●●●●○

This is Patagonia tramping at its best, and with **cosy, convivial lodges along the way**, you don't even have to suffer. The walk winds its way along brilliant turquoise lakes and through rocky crags toward a spectacular end point. On top of that, the track is well maintained and the bustling town of Puerto Natales is a delightful departure point with parillas enough for the most discerning foodie.

## Mt Kinabalu Summit Climb

MALAYSIA | 6 DAYS | 135kms



DIFFICULTY ●●●●○

Rising from the forests of UNESCO World Heritage-listed Kinabalu National Park, Mount Kinabalu will challenge even the sturdiest trampers. The track bends upward from **lowland rain forest to emerald montane forest**, cloud forest and sub-alpine meadow before reaching a crown of gleaming granite. Most trekkers do the heaviest lifting on the first day and stay overnight before a sunrise summit.

## The West Highland Way

SCOTLAND | 6 DAYS | 135kms



DIFFICULTY ●●○○○

Think of this as the **United Kingdom's bonnie reply to Italy's Blue Path through Cinque Terre** – but, you know, with whisky! Perfect for those new to rambling, the track offers stunning views of the of the Ben Nevis mountain range and Scottish Highlands. Call in at small villages and quaint B&Bs along the trail. As for the evenings, expect cosy fires, hearty food...and indecipherable accents!

Ready to lace up your boots? Come in-store, call 0800 713 715 or visit [HOT.CO.NZ](http://HOT.CO.NZ) and let's chat.