

KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY

SEA KAYAKING

The “Ring of Fire” journey is a ship-based exploration of the southern reaches of the Kamchatka Peninsula and Kuril Island chain. 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 ship as a floating base camp, we hope to paddle twice 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. 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. Landing ashore by kayak, we can stretch our legs and enjoy walks on the lush tundra. 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. Zodiacs will be available for extended shore excursions for those who do not wish to paddle on any given day.

Kayakers should be of an intermediate standard and have paddled before on outings up to 12 km in length. You do not have to be an expert or know how to roll but should have an adventurous spirit and recognise that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. This is cold water kayaking and should not be your first paddling experience. 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.

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 one metre swell and some current. The water surface will vary from calm to wind chop. Your guide will assess 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.

For additional experience, rent a kayak locally before leaving home and seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. DO practice paddling in a variety of conditions prior to the trip.

We'd be happy to talk to you about your level of experience and may be able to advise you how to obtain the necessary skills before your trip.

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 kayak group.

EXPEDITION NOTES

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 are 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.

RING OF FIRE-KAMCHATKA AND KURIL ISLANDS

16 - 28 September 2011

Our journey begins in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, the main city of Kamchatka and 6766 kms from Moscow. 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.

The Kuril Islands, often shrouded in fog, have a charm all of their own. Lying like giant, volcanic stepping-stones between Kamchatka and Hokkaido, 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 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.

ITINERARY

Day 1 – Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy

Upon your arrival at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy airport, you will be transferred to the Akademik Shokalskiy in the evening for a late night departure.

Days 2-3 – South East Kamchatka Coast

We cruise south along the impressive mountain range of the east Kamchatka coast to Vestnik Bay. Both ashore and from our kayaks we'll see snow-capped volcanoes, waterfalls and plenty of marine life. We hope to 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 4 – Onto the Kurils

On Shumshu, we explore the coastline and rivers that snake through grassy wetlands with remnant orchids and wild roses. 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, paddle around the kelp filled bays of the island or have a closer inspection of the impressive layered deposit of compacted volcanic ash.

Day 5 – Paramushir Islands

Today we hope to paddle the shores of Paramushir Island and experience a cliff-top hike. Five of Paramushir's 20 volcanoes are still active. 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.

Days 6-9 – 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 Kurils. We plan to make many kayak excursions and these may include: Ekarma island which offers sanctuary to many birds and sea otters; tracing Ainu culture on Shiashkotan; Lovushki and its boisterous Steller sea lion colony; the magnificent emerald green caldera of Yankicha and Chirpoy Island, home to twin volcanoes.

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Day 10 – Urup

Urup offers 120kms of stunning volcanoes, lush vegetation, lakes and rivers. Paddle the Twins, a geological wonderland of twisted basalt sea cliffs, hike up to Japanese bunkers with spectacular views and tufted puffin nests. On the west coast, we may kayak through basalt tunnels of Petroskov Rocks.

Days 11-12– Iturup and Kunashir

We hope to paddle and make some landings along the little-visited shores of Iturup, the largest island in the Kuril chain. 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.

At Kurilsk, on Kunashir Island, the locals welcome us with tours and performances.

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.

Day 13– Arrive Korsakov

Arrive early morning at Sakhalin's southern port town of Korsakov. Our magical adventure finishes with a transfer to the airport for early morning flights.

GENERAL INFORMATION

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE “RING OF FIRE”

- 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, otters and the chance of seeing the Kamchatka brown bear.
- Fascinating volcanoes and geothermal activity including hot springs-perfect for a soak!

THIS VOYAGE INCLUDES

- Group transfers to and from the ship.
- Ship's accommodation. All public areas are open to all passengers.
- All meals on board ship.
- All shore excursions from the ship including Zodiacs.
- Lectures, videos, slide and film shows and guide services.
- Medical services. Basic infirmary on board.
- Port taxes and port charges imposed by government authorities.
- Pre-departure information and briefing.
- The trip price comprises the voyage cost plus a surcharge for the kayaking option. This surcharge covers use of a drysuit, all your paddling and kayak equipment and the services of a professional sea kayak guide.

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THIS VOYAGE DOES NOT INCLUDE

- Air transport to and from the ship.
- 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.
- 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.

SOUTHERN SEA VENTURES
HEAD OFFICE – SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

PO Box 641, St Ives, NSW 2075

Ph: (02) 8901 3287 Fx: (02) 8901 3297

International phone or fax inquiries: 61 2 8901 and the last four digits

Email: ssvtrips@southernseaventures.com

Website: www.southernseaventures.com

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SHIP DETAILS

Akademik Shokalskiy was built in Finland in 1985 as an ice-strengthened research vessel. In 1998 she was refurbished to provide comfortable accommodation for 54 passengers.

Akademik Shokalskiy is not a luxury ship, she is homely and strong, built to be a working vessel and refitted to a comfortable passenger standard. The accommodation is simple yet comfortable and the meals are wholesome and delicious. The mood on board is definitely casual. A favourite pastime on board is to stand on the deck or in the bridge, watching for wildlife and absorbing the dramatic scenery. A small fleet of Zodiacs, (rubber inflatable boats), with outboard motors enable us to travel from ship to shore.

Length-71.6 metres, beam-12.8 metres, draft-4.5 metres, cruising speed-10 knots.

Chef – European, Australian or New Zealand, Captain & Crew – Russian.

General Facilities:- Bar/lounge/library area, sauna, laundry service, medical services, dining area.

There are six classes of cabins on board the *Akademik Shokalskiy*.

The Captain's Suite: Double bed in separate room, plus foldout couch that can be used as a single bed; forward and port windows; lounge and table area; fridge; TV; video player and private bathroom, with shower, toilet and washbasin.

The Mini Suite: Double bed in a separate room, foldout couch that can be used as a single bed, TV, DVD player, windows, desk, and private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin.

Quad Private: Two upper and lower bunks, window and private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. Suitable for a family of four or a group of friends travelling together.

Twin Private: Two bunks, a desk, windows and private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin.

Twin Public: Two bunks, desk, small washbasin, ample storage & hanging space, couch and a porthole. Showers and toilets are close by and are shared with other Main Deck cabins.

Triple Public: Two lower bunks and one upper bunk, desk, small washbasin, ample storage and hanging space and portholes. Showers and toilets are close by and shared with other Main Deck cabins.

