



**CICERONI**  
T R A V E L

# SUGAR PLUM FAIRIES CHRISTMAS IN ST PETERSBURG

SUNDAY 22 – FRIDAY 27 DECEMBER 2019 (6 DAYS)

LECTURERS: TOM DUNCAN & ELENA GAVRILOVA

£2530

- Spend Christmas in one of Europe's most enchanting cities
- Three guided visits exploring the Hermitage Palace Museum, to include the Diamond Treasury
- Visits to the Yusupov Palace & the famed Fabergé Museum
- See Tsarskoe Seloe & Pavlosk - the most enchanting of the country palaces
- Many opportunities to attend the Christmas ballet, opera & concerts
- Stay in the historic 5\* Astoria Hotel close to the Hermitage & Nevsky Prospekt



St Petersburg, Hermitage

## OVERVIEW

Tchaikovsky's ballet, *The Nutcracker*, was premiered on 18 December 1892, at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. The ballet was not a success, though the suite made up from some of the more famous movements was widely appreciated. It is only since the 1960s that the full ballet has again come to be widely performed and is now a staple of Christmas celebrations throughout the world, none more so than in St Petersburg itself. So, why not join us in the former Imperial capital this coming Christmas and see this wonderful ballet performed on its home stage, together with many other excitements - musical, operatic, architectural and artistic?

Travellers who have been to St Petersburg are often overwhelmed by a visit to the city, the Hermitage Palace Museum and the Imperial Palaces outside. Huge in scale, lavish in decoration, extraordinary in terms of the number, range and quality of contents, they can seduce and frustrate in equal measure – particularly so if visited during the 'peak' summer months. Our visit is designed both for someone who is planning a first visit and equally for those who may have been to St Petersburg in the past and encountered these places on an 'introductory' basis. If you would like to spend time discovering them without crowds, in an unhurried and scholarly fashion, this may very well be the visit for you?

The Hermitage, originally built as a 'Winter' Palace, dominated the city. It was built for the Empress Elizabeth by the Italian architect, Bartolomeo Rastrelli, between 1754 and 1762, and Catherine the Great added an adjacent *hermitage* so that she could house her fast expanding art collections in a building almost separate from the more formal state rooms of the main palace, though with easy access between the two. Thus, palace and museum came to be combined on the same site. In the nineteenth century even more space was set aside for the display of the ever growing Imperial art collections – a treasure trove which we shall explore over three visits.

The Russian aristocracy also built and furnished some amazing palaces, none more so than the Yusupovs, whose palace we shall visit. The Russian Art Museum and the Fabergé Museum will also be included.

Once established in and around their new capital, the Romanov family built several country palaces at Tsarskoe Selo, the so-called Tsar's Village. These offer a more personal insight into the daily lives of the Imperial family and we shall visit the gloriously opulent Catherine Palace; while in contrast we shall have a private guided tour of the nearby neo-classical Pavlosk when closed to the public.

We shall stay at the **5\* Astoria Hotel**, a member of the Rocco Forte group of hotels, ideally located a few minutes walk from the banks of the River Neva and the Hermitage. Sitting on one side of an impressive public space with the magnificent St Isaac's Cathedral in its centre, the city's main shopping street, Nevsky Prospekt, is nearby.

## ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Sunday 22 December – We fly from London’s Heathrow and on arrival in **St Petersburg** we travel into the city and check into our hotel, the **5\* Astoria**. Please note that it is possible to fly to Russia from other airports, subject to availability. Later that evening we have dinner in the hotel’s restaurant.

**Day 2:** Monday 23 December – We begin with an **Introduction to the City** by coach, tracing its origins from 1703 onwards. From the banks of the Neva a remarkable panorama of eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings can be seen, all of them superbly restored, their gold domes and spires glittering in the winter light. We continue to the **Yusupov Palace**, once the home of Russia’s richest aristocratic family. Here we shall find an amazing range of receptions rooms, together with the more intimate family spaces in one of which Rasputin was murdered. We break for a group lunch after which we continue to the **Russian Art Museum**. This contains Russian icons and paintings up to the early twentieth century, laid out in one of the former Imperial palaces. We return to the hotel late afternoon and this, and subsequent evenings will be free for you to attend the ballet, opera or a concert.

**Day 3:** Tuesday 24 December – We walk the short distance from our hotel for our first visit to the **State Hermitage Museum**. Designed and decorated by a large cast of architects and craftsmen, our morning will be spent unravelling this complex palace. We shall also have a look at some **Italian Paintings** with famous works by Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo, concluding with exceptional paintings and sculptures by Titian, Caravaggio, Bernini and many others. After a group lunch in a nearby restaurant, we continue to the recently opened **Fabergé Museum**. Here you will find not only the largest collection of the fabled ‘Easter Eggs’ but room after room of exquisitely fashioned objects. We return to the hotel by late afternoon and the evening will be free.

**Day 4:** Wednesday 25 December – This Christmas morning we drive out to the Tsar’s village, **Tsarskoe Selo**, much loved by the Imperial family where we visit the favourite retreat of Catherine the Great. It contains a remarkable ensemble of interiors charting many changes of style from the Rococo exoticism of the fabled Amber Room to the cool sophistication of Charles Cameron’s Neo-classical interiors. We return to the city for a truly festive **Christmas Lunch**, after which, unsurprisingly, the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free!

**Day 5:** Thursday 26 December – We return to the **Hermitage** for a private visit to the **Diamond Treasury**, an astonishing assemblage of personal objects representing Imperial taste over many centuries. We end our morning with a look at the **Flemish, Dutch and English Collections** – here are rooms full of masterpieces by Rubens and Van Dyck, stunning paintings by Rembrandt, wonderful Dutch landscapes and four rooms of English works of art. We lunch in a local restaurant after which we walk to the **General Staff Building** facing the Hermitage across Palace Square. Here we shall find, recently redisplayed in the restored interiors, a magnificent display of Impressionist and later works culminating in masterpieces by Picasso and Matisse. The evening will be free.

**Day 6:** Friday 27 December - Our last visit will be to **Pavlosk**, built for Catherine’s son, Tsar Paul I by Charles Cameron, but much extended by later Romanov owners. For many, it is the most elegant of all the country palaces capturing the Romanov family in domestic mode. Closed on Fridays, we have secured a rare, private visit led by the Chief Curator. At the end of the visit, suitable weather permitting, we travel through the palace park by horse drawn sled through the snow to our final lunch. We then continue to the airport for the flight to London.

**Participants will be able to attend opera and ballet performances – details of these will be issued once the programmes are published later this year.**

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £2530    **Without flights** £2295    **Deposit** £325    **Single Supplement** £360 (Double for Sole Use)

**Hotel** 5 nights with breakfast at 5\* Hotel Astoria

**Room Upgrades** per room (subject to availability): Deluxe £150, Superior £395, Junior Suite £595

**Flights** British Airways

Outward: **BA878** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **0925**, arrive St Petersburg **1545**

Return: **BA879** Depart St Petersburg **1645**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1725**

**Price includes** 1 dinner & Christmas Lunch with wine, water & coffee, 4 lunches with water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan, Stephen Brook & Elena Gavrilova

**Not included** Travel to/from Heathrow, 4 dinners, Visa (from approx £100 for standard 21 day service excluding agency fees: please note that as part of the process you will need to provide biometric data (fingerprints) at either the Russian Embassy or CIBT Visa Agency offices in London – details will be sent with the booking confirmation)



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