

BEFORE YOU GO – FULL ITINERARY – VISA SUPPORT – SERVICE EXTRAS

Day 1. Getting to the Elbrus region.

FULL package in brief:

Our guide meets you at MinVody airport. Probably you will wait for some other members from a next flight. After that our bus will take you to our hotel. Travel time is about 4 hours. Our reps meet you at hotel and arrange rooms. You will have dinner at hotel.

MINIMAL package in brief:

You have to come to our hotel yourself. Our reps meet you at hotel and arrange rooms. Dinner is not included.

Features and considerations on Full and Minimal (or partial) packages:

- If you come not on the day 1 exactly but come a couple of days before there is no reason to pay for Group transportation on that day.
- If you come on day 1 but do not wish to wait until a party of group members are ready for group transportations (this may take 1-2 hours, see full information below) you can take a taxi from airport to our hotel. Our guide will help you with this. The cost of taxi is about 3500 Rubles so if you have 3 friends for the ride it becomes even a bit cheaper than group transportation.
- On one hand it is possible not to request group transportation initially and make final decision right at the airport when you come. You can take taxi or inform our guide you wish our 'group' transfer. On the other hand if we do not count you for group transfer initially there may be no vacant seats in our currently leaving bus. We strongly recommend to request group transportation in advance if you are planning to use it.
- If you request 'group' transportation in advance it may be cancelled only 24 hours before departure. It may not be cancelled right at the airport.

Mineralnye Vody airport, meeting and 'group' transportation, hotel:

Normally (if this was not discussed and ordered before) we expect to meet you on the first day of your tour itinerary at Mineralnye Vody (MRV) airport. Short name is MinVody. On the last day of your itinerary we will take you back to that airport.

- Our representative will meet you at the arrival hall with the sign "Pilgrim Tours". Do not forget to inform us about your flight details (flight number).

1. The transportation from MinVody airport to our hotel in Elbrus area on the first day of the tour is included into the FULL tour package cost but with some limitations

- If one's flight comes before 11:00 am we do not guarantee our people meet him from the flight. Probably he has to wait until 11:00 when our bus comes to airport.

- If one's flight comes later than 20:00 am one has to order a private transportation. The time is set according to the flights timetable and may be different in the next season.

- Although our guides meet every flight there is no certainty when our regular buses leave airport. Everything depends on the number of people. From popular flights buses often go immediately but sometimes there may be even 3 hour gap. The exact times depend on summer timetable and flights of customers. Airport has good not crowded spaces for waiting, free WiFi, cafes and shops.

2. There is no refund for unutilized group transportation. If you requested it but do not need it you should cancel it at least 24 hours in advance. 'Group' transportation may be arranged only on regular dates and with group. It may not be moved to other date.

3. On the way: It takes from about 4 hours to get to our hotel from the airport. During the drive we can make stops for toilet or some food shopping. If you need something - ask our guide or a driver.

4. At the mountain hotel: It will save your time if you choose your room mates beforehand. There are twin and triple rooms in the hotel, with toilet and shower. Single accommodation may be available for additional cost in case there are vacant rooms in hotel or if you ordered that in advance. Your mountain guide and our English speaking representative will meet you there or at the airport. Overnight in the hotel (2100 m. above sea level).

Day 2. Mt. Cheget hike

Acclimatization ascent (using ski lifts) of Cheget mountain, 3450 m.

Breakfast at hotel on this day is included in all packages. There is a hike to Mt. Cheget on this day. After we return back to the valley there is a lunch at local cafe (optional) and dinner at hotel (optional).

Normally we use lifts on this day. We think that lifts are very useful. They allow you to stay more time on high altitude and a climber has moderate activity and is not tired. This gives better acclimatization. One can not become trained within 2-3 days before the climb but can easily become exhausted or have problems with legs. We consider that it is better to have moderate activity on high altitude for acclimatization than to have a hard job on lower altitude which gives not much for acclimatization but may be harmful for your knees. However if one wants he can go without lifts. There is a good visible road between stations.

If you are in a very good shape and/or have very good acclimatization you can avoid lifts and walk. Obviously walking requires more time than lifts so please discuss your timing with our guide in advance to make sure you meet the group after your walk. There is a good visible road under lifts so you do not need guidance on the way.

After the upper lifts station there is the mountain edge to the summit of Cheget 3450 m. If the weather is good we can spend 40 minutes on the top for making pictures and sightseeing. Then we go down to Cheget village again and have a lunch there in a local cafe (optional) at about 3 pm.

NOTE that this is the last day in the valley so you have to prepare your equipment today. If you have questions please discuss with our guide or reps in hotel. If you wish to hire any equipment, ask your guide.

Day 3. The Base camp at the Barrels huts.

- After breakfast we start from the mountain hotel with all necessary climbing gear. You can leave your unnecessary gear at the hotel. We set our base camp at the Barrels huts (3800 m).
- You will carry your own equipment/clothes from hotel to lifts (5 minutes) and from lifts to the huts (5 minutes). Sometimes (not often) the 3rd leg of lifts is closed and it may occur that you have to walk from lifts to the huts. It takes about 40 minutes along a good trail. That is why please have a big backpack along not a handbag for your gear.
- After a short rest and tea we start for a hike up to the beginning of the Pastuckhov rocks and probably higher (4200-4300 m/ 14100 ft). Depending on weather and time your guide may offer to have a short snow\ice\rope\self-belay technique courses. Lunch, dinner and overnight at the Barrels huts.

The barrels huts are not the highest huts but the most comfortable ones. There are electric power, light and heaters, personal beds, separate big dining room and kitchen. One of the important rules for acclimatization is: **walk as high as you can but sleep as low and comfortable as it is possible**. This gives you to relax and rest after hard day. Having night on high elevation in bad conditions makes climber tired without any activity and you can get up even more exhausted than you were several hours ago.

About Minimal, Full packages and options:

Meals at huts are included in all packages, you can not deduct them.

The only optional thing on this day is Lift ticket. We strongly recommend to use lifts on this day because the walk itself is very strenuous because you have to get from 2300 m to 3800 m and also you have a backpack with personal gear. If you still wish to avoid lifts it is possible but please discuss this with our guide in advance. Hardly one can take part in the group hiking activity to 4200 m after the walk. Backpack transportation is possible but must be discussed and settled beforehand.

Day 4. Acclimatization hike and relax day.

We think that it is good to have a good rest before a summit day. That is why this day we will go for an acclimatization hike not higher than 4300 m (14100 ft) and return to the huts for rest. Depending on weather and time your guide may offer to have a short snow\ice\rope\self-belay technique courses. Our tours do not assume any previous experience and many participants in groups are novices. Your guide will give some

training just to make you feel more comfortable with crampons or ice axe but we do not expect you use any climbing technique when it really concerns safety. If there is a danger our guides will rope you up and make proper belay.

Although we do not recommend strenuous hikes on this day if you want to go higher our guide can accompany you but not higher than Pastuckhov rocks. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, overnight in the Barrels huts. Sometimes if all people in a group are in a very good shape and have good acclimatization we can climb the top even this day. However the decision about this must be made on day 3.

Day 5. The Summit.

We stand up early in the morning (at about 2am) and leave The Barrels after breakfast at about 3am. The idea is to meet sunrise somewhere over the Pastuckhov rocks. It is possible to hire a snow-cat

(Ratrak) for a group. This vehicle carries climbers (12 people) up to Pastuckhov rocks and saves 2 hours and a lot of energy. Generally, for an average group, it takes about 7 hours to reach the top and 3 hours to come back to The Barrels.

Generally we stay at the Barrels this night. If a group returns to the Barrels before 2 pm we can discuss the possibility to descend to the valley and have overnight at the mountain hotel. However this will require additional payment for hotel, because this night is paid for the huts.

Day 6. Reserve day.

In case we climbed the top on 'day 5' we descend to the mountain hotel and have a rest day with short hikes around or shopping at the wool market. Breakfast at the Barrels, [lunch at an Azau cafe \(optional\)](#), dinner/party is at local cafe (included). In case we do not climb the top on 'day 5' because of bad weather - this day will be the summit day.

Day 7. Descend to the valley.

In case we climb the summit on 'day 5' we go for a hike. There are some options, you can discuss this with your guide: mineral springs, hike to a side valley. Some people prefer to stay in the hotel and walk nearby. In case we climb the summit on 'day 6' we descend to the mountain hotel.

This is the latest day we can try to climb Mt. Elbrus. If there was bad weather for some days we can try to climb the top this day but we must descend to the valley this day so it may be a hard day for everybody.

Day 8. Departure.

Breakfast at hotel (included).

[Group transportation from hotel to airport on this day is optional.](#)

Our group bus comes to the airport at about 11 am (leaves hotel at about 07:30 am). Those who need earlier transportation (do not forget that it takes 4 hours to get to airport from Elbrus area so for 9 am flight you have to leave our hotel at 4 am) must order a private transportation.

- Those customers who have late flights can either go with early bus or order a private transport. In any case they can discuss the situation with guide and reps and probably there may be a convenient solution especially if there are some other people on that flight

If someone leaves later (not on regular transportation dates) he must order a private transport from us or leave on his own.

SUMMIT ATTEMPTS

Only one Elbrus summit attempt is included in our tour cost.

A hike/climb will be considered as attempt if a group with our guides starts earlier than 5 am from huts and reaches elevation at least 5000 meters.

Yes, there are 2-3 reserve days for a climb. However that does not mean 2-3 attempts. These reserve days will be utilized in case of bad weather. A group can wait 2-3 days and make an attempt when the weather is better.

If summit attempt was not successful (for a person or for a group), there are still reserved days in huts and group (person) can stay there and climb on their own. If one wishes to climb with a guide there is additional cost for a guide.

Why we have this limitation?

There are some reasons. Because the economical reason seems to be more understandable, here is the economical explanation below. Other reasons are also important but hardly may be completely explained here.

If we "include" as many attempts as participants wish (we have 3-4 reserve days) there may be 3-4 attempts for everybody. Moreover people may want to try again personally on different days.. Why not? It is included! It brings complete anarchy in the itinerary. Some people will go down, some people will stay in huts and what is worse they will have right to change their mind many times within one hour.

To handle all this headache we must make a tour at least 50% more expensive.

Why? Cost of guides work is high during the climb. We must pay for additional guides and cook

IRREGARDLESS if we finally use them or not. If we declare one can stay and try again we must arrange a guide and cook in all cases. But we can not just call to a guide and say - tonight you climb with a customer. We can not call to a cook and say we need diner today. They must be here already i.e. they, their and client's accommodation, meals must be reserved, prepared and paid.

The situation when a group made an attempt and everybody wants to to try again happens probably 1 time for 5 seasons.

Should we make all 40 tours (groups) per season more expensive in order to make 2-3 attempts included?

More often case is when after a successful group climb some people return without success and want to try again on the next day.

Must other people who climbed the top successfully pay higher cost for their tour to let other people stay in huts and try again and again?

To make tours cheaper for all we made a decision to include only one attempt in the tour cost. In most cases one attempt is enough for a person irregardless if he successfully climbed the top or not. We consider that other participants must not pay for those who wish to climb again.

More attempts are NOT prohibited, if one wants he can climb again and again. We even keep reservation in huts. But if he wants a guide the guide must be paid. We think this is a fair play.

About The Barrels huts, 3900 m.

The Barrels huts is a group of 10 huts right near the upper lift station. Each hut has a 'big' room with 4 beds, a small room with one bed and a table, a small room for luggage. There is electric heater, light and electric plugs (220V). Toilet is outside and very, very basic. Shower and tap water are absent. Water for cooking and other purposes comes from a spring (from mid June to mid August) or from snow and ice any other time. A kitchen with full sized gas stove and a big dining room is in a separate shed. It's enough warm inside a Barrel, beds are with mattresses. Sleeping bag is needed mostly for hygiene.



The Barrels huts from above in May.



Barrel hut and Eastern summit.



4-bed room in a Barrel.



Another 4-bed room.

VISA SUPPORT & RUSSIAN VISA

Most foreign nationals are required to have entry visas to travel to the Russian Federation (Russia).

Please contact a Russian Consulate in your country in advance to check if you need an entry visa.

Russian entry visas can be obtained at local Russian Embassy or Consulate. Proper invitation (visa support) from a specially authorized travel agency (host company) is required.

A visa to the Russian Federation is a document, permitting stay in Russia for a specific period of time. A visa lists exact entry/exit dates. You can enter/leave Russia on any date within visa period but overstay is a serious violation and in case of overstay leaving the country could be much more troublesome than entering it.

If one overstay he will be stopped at the passport control gates and will be delayed in Russia for some paperwork (formal extending of visa period) and penalty fees. This may take a week or more.

We can send visa support for more days than a period of our real service but for not more than 20 nights. If you need wider period please make real reservations in hotels through us for the extra days or address a visa company to purchase proper kind of visa. A sample of visa company: www.visatorussia.com

Standard tourist visa maximum period is 30 days. If you need more days you definitely have to purchase visa support from a visa company, we can not make such visa support.

Explanations about possible Russian Visa obtaining difficulties.

Requirements for foreign citizens to enter Russia (tourist visa)

- Passport: must be valid 6 months beyond intended stay
- Russian Visa: required
- Vaccination: not required

Requirements for obtaining Russian tourist visa in a Russian Consulate.

- Your original passport with at least 2 blank visa-designated pages (passport must be valid for at least 6 months after intended departure date from Russia).
- Two copies of Russian visa application form (Consulate's Questionnaire), completed and signed.
- One passport-size photo signed on the back.
- Visa support (invitation) page(s) from host company. ('Voucher' and 'Confirmation' forms)
- Consular fee (different in different countries) must be paid.

We will send you visa support (invitation) page.

We will send it as email attachment. That is a page with two forms: "Voucher" and "Confirmation of Hosting". You have to print it out and pass to the Consulate along with other necessary items. There will be some comments sent with visa support. Those comments will help you to fill out the Consulate application form (questionnaire). If you are going to apply for visa not in the country of your citizenship, let us know that country. Some Consulates (such as in France, Japan, Sweden and some others) have their own demands for the visa support edition.

All **Russian Visas should be registered upon arrival** to the Russian Federation.

According to Russian law, your Russian visa must be registered within 72 hours upon your arrival (excluding weekends and official holidays).

This is not one time procedure. You must be registered in every new region if you stay there for more than 72 hours.

For example:

- If you come and stay in Moscow for a week you must be registered in Moscow. If you come to Elbrus area then and stay there for a week you will be registered there again.
- If you come and stay in Moscow for 1-2 nights, travel to Elbrus region for a week and on the way back home stay for 1-2 nights in Moscow again you do not need registrations in Moscow. You will be registered in Elbrus area only.

Registration sounds a fearful procedure but if you purchase a tour from a tourist company that is completely their business to register you. That does not require your personal presence or participation in the procedure. If you have our tour in Elbrus region we register you there.

However we can not register you in other regions. Registration must be made by local host only. If you

buy our Elbrus tour but have longer visa period and travel somewhere else we can not help with registration there.

Registration must be made by your local host. If you stay at a hotel, the hotel must register your visa. You will be asked of your visa and passport at the reception desk. A small registration fee may be imposed. Always ask hotel about registration paper. Although registration is their duty their staff may be lazy or untidy especially in hostels.

Please note that not registering your Russian visa may lead to serious problems: detention by police, fines on departure, prevention from boarding the plane, etc. We strongly advise you to register your Russian visa to avoid possible unnecessary inconveniences. Paying a fine does not free you from registering. If you do not register within 72 hours you must pay fine before you may be registered.

An unofficial hint about registration:

Registration will be checked at the passport control gates when you leave Russia and in Elbrus region (MinVody). Hardly you will be checked for registration papers in Moscow or in other big Central Russia cities but in Elbrus area you will be checked for sure. That is why if you wish to travel in Russia and have no certainty about registrations better come to Elbrus area first and have our registration there. This only registration in vast majority of cases is sufficient for your further trip and at passport control gates then.

Russian Visa obtaining difficulties and solution.

The main feature which brings problem is: Consulates demand that EVERY day of your stay in Russia must be reserved in a hotel/hostel and paid beforehand. One must be ready to prove that if the Consulate asks.

If you reserve (and pay) 30 days in a Moscow hotel and have a voucher from the hotel for 30 day stay - there will be absolutely NO problems with 30 day Russian visa. Problems may occur if you have actual reservations for 10 days but wish to have visa period for 20-30 days.

Some words about visa support documents (invitation).

Officially there must be only 2 documents/forms from 'host' company: "Voucher" and "Confirmation of Hosting". Your places of stay and hotels for the whole period must be mentioned there along with mentioning of full payment for the services.

Visa is not a right but a permission. If Consulate wishes it can ask for ANY additional documents. For example Western Consulates always ask official confirmation of salary from Russians additionally to many other documents.

Russian Consulates sometimes ask for direct confirmation of stay from hotel (a direct receipt or direct Voucher from hotel). The difference in comparison with "standard" visa support is that this must be not from host company but from a hotel. This direct hotel confirmation may be received through host company if you really reserve rooms from them or from hotel if you reserve directly.

What does that mean?

A host company can put 30 day of visa period in their official visa support (Voucher+Confirmation). However exact hotel(s) and places must be mentioned in that visa support.

A Consulate (an officer) can accept this and issue Russian visa. In many cases they do so. However he can ask for direct confirmation from hotel(s) for the whole period if he suspects you do not have full reservations. If you can not show that hotel confirmation most likely your visa application will be rejected.

What may be done and how that really works.

- Ask for smaller visa period.

Normally Consulates do not ask for hotel confirmations if your stay is less than 15-16 days. 16-21 day period is risky. If you ask for 21-30 days you can be almost sure you will be asked about direct hotel confirmations.

- Follow our recommendations (we send them with visa support) precisely.

For example: If you order only our 8 day Elbrus tour but wish to have 15 day visa support we confirm 15 days of stay in our Elbrus hotel. Speak with Consulate accordingly - only Elbrus - other places are transit!! If Consulate asks for confirmation from Elbrus hotel for 15 day we can make that. If you inform them about your wish to stay in Moscow they will ask you about confirmation from a Moscow hotel which we can not provide without real reservation.