

Testimonials

1.

“I have just returned from the most wonderful trip to St. Petersburg. Organised by the St Petersburg Collection, this was a tour put together by Philip Birkenstein as part of the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Hermitage Museum. These trips seem to have become a much sought-after feature for Fabergé admirers. This was my second such tour, the first time being in 1998.

What distinguishes this from other tours is the personal contact Philip has amassed over 30 years and the friendship and appreciation nurtured over these years. So we not only met the Directors, Curators and Public Relations staff of all the major palaces, we also gained access to these places ahead of the crowds, in some instances when they were officially closed. Not many people can boast of having a ballroom, throne room or private chambers completely alone with your tour guide. We saw the Hermitage, Peterhof and Catherine Palace, each more or less for a full day. We were privileged to see some real gems such as The Little Hermitage, the Amber Room



and the Agate Room in Tsarskoe Selo. We also saw an exquisite preview of historic Russian porcelain in a little pleasure palace by the lake, followed by a cocktail party in the Cameron Gallery.

For me, the undisputed highlight was the new “Fabergé Museum” in the Shuvalov Palace. This was a very nostalgic venue for me as it used to be the headquarters of the “Friends of St.Petersburg” where we had our farewell party, way back in 1998.



The Fabergé exhibition houses 9 Imperial eggs. There were also several display cases of treasures, categorized by colour of the enamel - salmon pink, dark blue, light blue, oyster white and so on. The display cases were assembled by function, such as belt buckles, desk ware or

smoking paraphernalia. Then more rooms with similar items of the same period, including ornamental icons.

Philip Birkenstein and the St.Petersburg Collection are able to continue the Fabergé family tradition through Theo Fabergé, Carl Fabergé’s grandson. Several of Theo Fabergé creations are exhibited in various Museums and Palaces in St. Petersburg. This year, the St. Petersburg Collection was able to present a “Hermitage Egg” to the Hermitage Museum for its 250th anniversary. This was presented by Philip to the Director of the Hermitage where it will be displayed in a newly envisaged Fabergé Room.

Another highlight was a visit to the Alexander Palace in Pushkin Village, the last home of Nicholas II and his family. This palace was long neglected but concerted efforts are being made to restore it. Sadly, although catalogued in 1917, most of the contents were dispersed to other institutions or were lost during the Second World War. Efforts are being made to trace these items, sometimes on the open market, sometimes items are donated or left in people’s wills. So it is hoped that, gradually, more and more pieces of furniture, artefacts, dresses or even toys will be found, to bring this Palace back to its original state.

We had such a great time with people I now think of as “our friends in St Petersburg”. I would particularly like to thank Freda and Nina for their unstinting help and immense knowledge which they were so ready to share with us. We celebrated the end of our trip with a sumptuous black tie dinner in the Evening Hall by the lake of Catherine’s Palace in Tsarskoye Selo.”



2.

“As this was our third trip with St. Petersburg Collection - and I hasten to add not our last - I just wanted to say how wonderful it still is. For the amount you charge we still cannot believe all we get, flights, junior suite facing St. Isaacs Cathedral in the 5* Astoria Hotel, full breakfast, wonderful guide, lunches, dinners at very different and top venues in the city and entrances to all the buildings you take us in.

It is not just that. We never had to queue and most times we went when the Palaces were closed, so hardly any other people around. Also, going into Museums before the general public and invitations to events not open to the public and much more.

How many people have a photo of themselves in front of Catherine’s Palace with NOBODY in the background? We do.

But the culmination of your trips is always the unique venue for the gala dinner on the last night, always kept a secret but always a feast for the eye, one year on a private island another in a stunning hall another overlooking a beautiful woodland, and always a surprise concert.

Our guide's knowledge of the Tsars and Russian history always astounds us, you are so lucky to have the same one each visit. The private coach with the same driver all week is an added bonus in that we can leave personal belongings safely on it.

Having travelled extensively around many parts of the world with private guides, your trip is up there with the best and we always come away having made new friends.”



Dates for the 2015 Tour are: 18-24 July 2015. If you would like to join us please contact Valerie Thomas for a current brochure:

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