

Secret Cats of the Russian Far East

Destination: Ussuri & Primorie, Russia **Season:** mid Nov – mid Mar



Expert guidance from one of Russia's leading Siberian Tiger conservationists



Exclusive access to a specialist photography hide for the Amur leopard



Contribute directly to the ongoing study and research of wild Siberian Tigers



Explore some of the most pristine and beautiful forests in the world in winter



Track wild Siberian Tigers and piece together their behaviours and movements

Dates:

- (1) Group Tour: 19th Nov – 10th Dec 2018
- (2) Group Tour: 27th Nov – 18th Dec 2018
- (3) Group Tour: 12th Feb – 5th Mar 2019
- (4) Group Tour: 20th Feb – 13th Mar 2019
- (5) Group Tour: 19th Nov – 10th Dec 2019
- (6) Group Tour: 27th Nov – 18th Dec 2019

Scheduled Group Tour information:

The above dates are for combining our Siberian Tiger Winter Tour and our Amur Leopard Photography tour. We run the Amur leopard tour both at the start and end of the Siberian tiger tour. So the itinerary below is for tours where the leopard section starts first, however some of the above dates start with the tiger section and then go to the leopards. There is no change to the itinerary (it is just reversed – and your start and end points are different). However enquire for further information about which dates are which.

Private / Tailored Tour information:

This tour can be booked anytime between the middle of November and the middle of March (this is the best season for tracking tigers and the only season the leopard hide is open), (subject to availability).

We also have flexibility for the duration of trip you would like to book.

Some of our clients prefer to book shorter or longer trips and we are happy to provide information about the costs for tailored tours.

Trips for any group size and any duration are possible, please enquire further for more information on our tailored Siberian tiger and Amur leopard tours.

Single supplements are only for nights in cities, the hide and all forest accommodation is sharing basis

Prices (2018-19 season):

Group Tour - 2018

£7,305 per person

*single supplement £100

Group Tour - 2019

£7,425 per person

*single supplement £100

Group Dates as a Private Tour

£16,995 for a solo traveller

£8,495 per person (2 people)

Private Tour on Other Dates

£12,150 for a solo traveller

£5,995 per person (2 people)

Overview

Day 1: Vladivostok / Kedrova

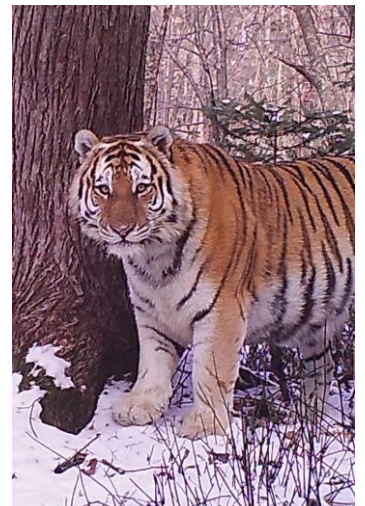
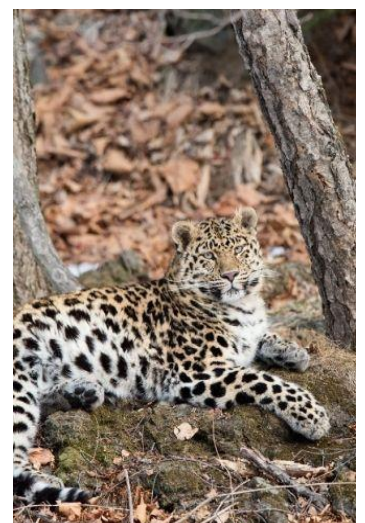
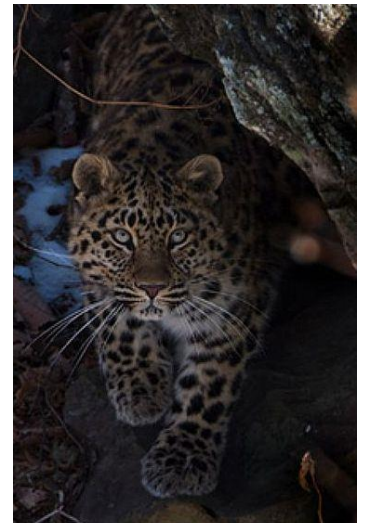
Day 2-7: Kedrova Pad NP

Day 8: Vladivostok

Day 9-20: Forest Tiger Reserve

Day 21: Khabarovsk

Day 22: Home





Tour Information

Introduction

This three week itinerary explores two of the least visited and most pristine ecosystems in the world; the Russian states of Ussuri, Primorye and Amur may not evoke the same thoughts and emotions as Siberia. But it is these states that harbour the remaining population of (wrongly named) Siberian tigers and the more correctly named Amur leopards and here there are many protected areas where they can still be found; they are quietly and slowly increasing in number and expanding their range whilst other tigers in the tropical countries of the Indian Subcontinent and South East Asia struggle against poaching, deforestation and increasing human population.

The downside of these huge forests (protected to some degree or another) is what makes them so great for tigers; that is their remoteness from the rest of the world. Because of their remoteness they are naturally very hard to police and thoroughly protect; which is what is wonderful about the reserve a few hours south of Khabarovsk. This reserve is the responsibility of a single dedicated conservationist and biologist; in the last few years he has become one of the world's greatest tiger conservationists. And it is his tireless work that the main reason for the increasing population of tigers here as he maintains daily patrols and has a great network of trackers, guides and forestry workers who work tirelessly to study and protect the wildlife here.

Despite the increasing number of tigers (censuses from 2013 showed 18 tigers around the reserve this increased to 22 in 2014, 23 in 2015 and remained at 23 for 2016-17) the reserve is large and continuous with millions of square kilometres of forest; and coming across one of these tigers will require patience, luck and all of the tracking skills of the guides. During the autumn and winter the tigers are 'easier' to see and track as they spend more time on the roads to avoid the deeper snow (winter) and mud (autumn) elsewhere; and we hope to see one as we patrol these pathways and the forests of the reserves.

For the leopard it is not a privately run forest reserve that we will head to, instead it is a national park, set up and operated for the protection and study of the Amur leopard in particular. It is here and other places around the Primorye that the leopard has seen a resurgence in numbers in recent years. From 2007 when the park was set up to 2017 the numbers have increase from around 30 to 80.

In a world that is suffering with decreasing numbers of big cats, whether it is for the illegal Chinese traditional medicine market, illegal pet trade, illegal fur trade or retribution killings from local people who suffer livestock and human predations at the hands of big cats; there are many problems resulting in decreasing populations around the world. It is remarkably refreshing that there is some good news for the tiger and leopard here in the harshest and least typical habitat that these adaptable cats inhabit.

However despite this good news and it is true that the numbers are steadily increasing, the number of wild Amur leopards is pitifully low.

As well as the tigers and leopards we hope to find there are other mammal species here (all are elusive) but we hope to see Manchurian wapati, Siberian roe deer, wild boar, sable, mink and raccoon dogs to name a few species. However we have set realistic expectations that this trip is very much for tracking of tigers and sightings of a tiger are very rare. Whilst we bait an area near the photography hide with the salt and grain that is attractive to the wild boar and deer species and this in turn brings the leopards closer there is of course still a chance that no leopards will appear when we are there. These are two of the most elusive and hard to see species in the world.

This combined tour is pioneering and you will be amongst the first tourists to come to both places during the wonderful winter time to try and find Siberian tigers and Amur leopards.

Because of the nature of Siberian tigers we cannot guarantee any sightings; however we can assure you all of an adventure of a life time and one that could result in you becoming one of the only non-Russian people to see wild Siberian tigers and Amur leopards!

We had great success on our first ever trip with clients here in February 2018 where the clients saw two different Amur leopards and got pictures and videos of both individuals. The first was a pregnant female in the day time (10am) and the second was a large adult male who came and fed on the deer all night, we got great viewings over several hours, fascinating behaviour and pictures and videos from both camera traps and night vision – which is available at the hide on request. And on our second trip (March 2018) we had an Amur leopard visit the hide area, which means a 100% success rate so far in leopard sightings for our trips here.

Itinerary

Day 1 Vladivostok / Kedrova Pad National Park		Arrival
<u>Accommodation:</u> Kedrova Pad National Park (Forestry Hotel)	<u>Food:</u> Depending on the time of arrival a light lunch / snacks will be provided and then dinner at the hotel.	<u>Transportation:</u> Private Vehicle



Today you will be met at the airport by your guide / interpreter and taken to the national park (~3 hours). On arrival here we will settle into the log cabin / hotel (it has large apartments which we will share) and have some food, we will meet the park rangers and have a briefing about the park, the hide and the way the photography hide operates here. If time allows (the days are short and the nights long here during winter) we will have a guided walk around some of the forest to look for wildlife and evidence of the elusive leopard. Tomorrow will be your first day in the hide.

Days 2-7 **Kedrova Pad National Park**

Amur Leopard Photography

Accommodation:

Kedrova Pad
National Park
(Forestry Hotel)

Food:

Breakfast and dinner will be served at the hotel and you will take some snacks into the hide – however smelly foods are not a good idea in the hide.

Transportation:

Walking

For the next 6 days you will have access to the hide. The hide accommodates 3 people, there are two bunks and one folding camp bed for sleeping and we recommend people spend the entire time (all 5 nights inside the hide). There is a toilet, gas heater and we will provide lots of food (we will bring food regularly and you will be in radio contact with the main accommodation). We recommend staying inside the hide the entire time and maybe receiving food deliveries every 2 days as this will dramatically decrease the disturbance around the hide and thus increase the chances of the leopard (there are 3-5 leopards that are currently using the area around the hide according to camera traps) coming around. The location of the hide was chosen to take advantage of natural features (water sources and the popular food trees utilised by the wild boar and deer species here) so that the ungulate animals naturally like to spend time here during the winter. The high density of prey animals around here increased the chances of leopards using the area too. To further increase our chances the area has been baited with salt and other minerals as well as grain for up to 2 months prior to our arrival. This is done just for us and is done in the hope that it will increase the presence of the prey animals and therefore the leopards ahead of our arrival.

The hide has been in use on and off for a number of years, most notably in 2007 when the BBC *Planet Earth* team came here and filmed wild Amur leopards for the very first time. From then until 2015 the hide was used sporadically by the occasional wildlife photographer and film crew. But in general the area was unknown and very difficult to arrange a visit too. Now the hide is open to tourists and Royle Safaris has managed to negotiate the use of the hide on our tours. With the success we have had on our Siberian tiger tours we believe that this is the perfect extension and hope to further show case this species and its stunning habitat to help increase awareness and raise much needed funds which goes the national park and surrounding communities to create a positive association with the wildlife and their continued survival.

In fact on our very first tour here in February 2018 we had success and a sighting and photographs of an Amur leopard.

Day 8 **Vladivostok**

Travelling

Accommodation:

Hotel Azimut (3*
Hotel)

Food:

Breakfast will be served at the hotel, no other meals are included today.

Transportation:

Private Vehicle

This morning you will leave the hide and come back to the main building for a shower, to pack up and get ready to leave for the city. Once back in Vladivostok the rest of the day will be free for you to explore, rest or do as you please. The city is quite pleasant to walk around, the frozen bay and the cars driving across it is a sight to see, the terminus of the Trans Siberian Express railway is another famous location in the city.

Tomorrow the next section of the trip begins and the travel from here back inland and north-west to the city of Khabarovsk on the other side of the famous and rugged Sikhote Alyn mountains. In fact it is the mountains that now is the boundary between the two sub populations of Siberian tigers, the larger population lives in the Primorye area and numbers around 300-350 individuals, whilst the tigers we will be going to track now live in the Khabarovsk Krai and number around 100-150. These are the most northerly tigers in the world and their population is very little known and because of this they have remained pretty much untouched by poachers, which is not the case with the tigers from the Primorye region.



Day 9 **Khabarovsk / Forest Reserve**

Travelling & Tiger Tracking

Accommodation:

Forest Reserve
(Traditional Cabins)

Food:

Breakfast will be served at the hotel and dinner at the base camp, but lunch is not included today.

Transportation:

Internal Flight and
Private Vehicles

This morning we will leave the hotel after breakfast to catch our short flight to Khabarovsk (~1 hour), on arrival in the airport we will be met by your Russian guide and your new interpreter and taken to meet the rest of the group (as some people will just be doing the Siberian tiger section and will be arriving in Russia today).

You will have a little briefing and some lunch if you are hungry and once all of the vehicles are loaded and we have been to a local supermarket to stock up on any supplies (alcohol, chocolate etc) you may like to take into the forest, you will be transferred out of the city of Khabarovsk and south to the wonderful forest reserve.

The drive to the reserve will take around 3-4 hours, depending on the weather and road conditions as well as what wildlife and tracks are seen along the way. Along the way you will begin to see the vastness of the taiga forest and the habitats of the tigers and other wildlife here. When entering the forest and reserve it is possible to see wildlife so keep your eyes peeled and any tracks spotted along or near the road will be examined and recorded.

When you arrive at the base camp you will be met by Alexander's team and shown to your cabin and then have dinner. Whilst the forestry team do not speak much (if any) English we will have our own translator with the group so communication will not be difficult. Plus when tracking and searching for tigers it is best to be quiet and we find hand signals work just fine.

When we are staying in the reserve all of our meals will be served here and we will eat together with the Russian crew in a dining room / kitchen that is part of the Russian team's units. The whole base camp is a small collection of wooden cabins; consisting of a circle of four log cabins for ourselves, while the staff live in similar adjacent cabins.

Our base camp for this trip is located in the centre of the reserve and so we are right in the heart of tiger country. Each log cabin has electricity (220 volt, Russian plug) (although power is only available from around 6pm – 11pm each night), fireplace, single beds (each cabin sleeping 2 people) and other basic furniture. They make quite homely cabins and welcome places to rest in the evenings after cold days in the forest. The accommodation is simple and nothing fancy, yet it is clean and cosy, especially in the winter time, being very typically Russian. For washing there is hot water in the local style banya (traditional Russian sauna), as well as fresh water is sourced from a natural well and provided to each cabin for daily use. The food usually consists of Russian national dishes and local foods including game & fish from the forests around here and locally grown vegetables & mushrooms. Around the base there are also several friendly pet dogs and cats. The base and cabins are largely powered by solar and wind energy, while eco-friendly bio-toilets are used in the visitor cabins. If time allows we may head out around the base on a tour to see if we can find any evidence of tiger activity. But in general our tiger tracking will start tomorrow, and the tour usually takes place after breakfast on the second day.

Days 10-20 **Forest Reserve**

Tiger Tracking

Accommodation:

Forest Reserve
(Traditional Cabins)

Food:

All of the meals will be prepared in the base camp or snacks in the field.

Transportation:

4x4 Vehicle,
Skiing, Snow
Mobiles & Walking

For the next 11 full days you will walk, drive and be taken around on snow mobiles and sledges as you explore this incredible reserve in search of a Siberian tiger. Using all of the knowledge and skills of our very own tiger expert and his team you will delve into the reserve and follow the signs left in the snow by this incredible predator. Our number one tiger target is one of the resident males who fairly predictably circumnavigate their territories roughly every 7-10 days. So hopefully we can find some tracks of a male in the area and from these make a plan where to look and base our searches. As the tigers use the same pathways and prefer to scent mark the same trees it is sometimes possible to stake out such trees and wait for the tiger to show up. There are some observation posts that can be manned for this purpose (however they are largely left in woeful repair and also they are not used in winter because of the extreme cold and genuine threat of hypothermia; but again any sightings will require patience and luck. The tigers here have been increasing in number steadily and there are usually litters of cubs around in the nearby forests as well.

Not only is this population healthy which is great news for the Siberian tigers there is enough food and space for them and more tigers to survive here into the future. Another great way of experiencing the Siberian tigers here is by helping the team to check their camera traps. These camera traps provide nearly 100% guaranteed chances of getting photos and videos of the tigers whilst we are in the reserve, as well as helping the work that Alexander and his team are doing here. By using camera traps we increase our chances of seeing what the tigers do when they



are most active, at night. By helping to protect the park of their commitment to conservation Siberian tigers we know this reserve and its wildlife better than anyone.

Whilst we cannot guarantee a sighting of a wild Siberian tiger we can all but assure you of seeing their tracks, scratch marks on trees as well as helping out and contributing to Siberian tiger conservation here. We will be arriving and tracking during the winter period and despite the snow and freezing temperatures seemingly making these difficult this is a good time to try and track down and observe Siberian tigers; the snow makes tracking them much easier and it concentrates their prey in certain areas where they can still access the vegetation and running water. The format of each day whilst we are staying in the reserve will be latish starts (we have to wait for the sun to come up and the temperatures to reach a reasonable level – even the tigers do not show any particular preference for time of day or night when they are most active), where we accompany the patrols on their daily duties as well as scouting out potentially good areas for tigers, followed by a lunch break and some rest time during the middle of day, we will then head out in the afternoon until nightfall. Of course this is one of the rarest and least encountered species in the entire world but by being here and tracking through the snow with expert guides you stand as good a chance as there is of seeing this stunning, huge and hardy cat. This reserve in winter can seem devoid of life with the forest being so quiet, many species have migrated south for the winter and certain mammals are hibernating. But certain species are hardy and are very active during the weekend. In fact 40 species of mammals have been recorded from the reserve. Herbivores such as Manchurian wapati, Siberian roe deer, Siberian musk deer and wild boar form the prey base for the tiger as well as other predators including wolves. There are also smaller carnivores in the forest and these include raccoon dogs, sable, Eurasian lynx, European minks, Eurasian otters, Siberian polecats and Eurasian badgers. The bird list is also impressive with over 100 species being recorded here; many of these are migratory and will not be here during winter. But regardless of what species are seen here during the tour and which are not, we can assure you that by sharing the beautiful taiga forest with Siberian tigers you will have a fantastic time and experience one of the world's last pristine environments.

At some point during these 11 days we will spend two days outside of the forest (the roads to get to these locations are also tiger habitats and important census routes that we have to monitor). One of the locations is the Utyos rehabilitation centre, which is a very special place where orphaned and injured tigers (and other wildlife) are brought and helped to regain strength or to learn vital life skills in order for them to be released back into the wild. This centre is located in prime tiger habitat and they often have wild tigers visit their captive animals and walk around the enclosures. You will spend a couple of hours there and this is a great place to see a Siberian tiger in the frozen forests of Russia up close. Yes they are in cages, but they provide you with a close view of the way they move and interact with the snow and harsh environment here. We hope to have seen wild Siberian tigers on the tour however this will provide a great chance for you to get close up pictures of this beautiful cat against the Russian taiga forest background.

You will also visit a local Udeghe village, the Udeghe are a group of indigenous people who live around here and you will be introduced to some of their culture and how they have lived in harmony with the forest and all its wildlife for generations.

Over these 11 days you may not see a tiger, but then again you might; we will do everything in our power to increase our chances but one thing is for sure. At some point whilst you are in the forest tracking the tigers at least one tiger will have seen you! With an animal that was so close to the brink of extinction, just the idea that anyone could have the chance of seeing a wild Siberian tiger was an impossible dream not that long ago. We hope that our eco-tours here continue to help the conservation work and then one day the population of tigers in the Russian Far East can grow to its historical numbers once again.

Day 21 **Khabarovsk**

Travelling

Accommodation:

Intourist Hotel (3* Hotel)

Food:

You will have breakfast at the base camp and then lunch and dinner are not included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & Walking.

This morning you can have a little longer in the reserve tracking tigers and taking in the taiga forest one last time. You will then be transferred back to the city of Khabarovsk and taken to the hotel for your last night in Russia. The rest of the day will be free for you to relax or maybe explore some of Khabarovsk. You can arrange with your interpreter about where to go if you would like to see some of the sites such as Lenin Square as well as a waterfront along the impressive Amur River; and if we wish he can also book a table for a group dinner to have a traditional Russian farewell meal.



Day 22 Home

Departure

Accommodation:

NA

Food:

No meals will be included today – but breakfast is likely to be included with your hotel booking.

Transportation:

Private vehicle

Today you will be transferred to the airport in time to get to catch your return flight home.

Your tour and all Royle Safaris services end upon transfer to the airport

Please note that the itinerary stated above is correct as our planned intentions for the tour. However adverse weather conditions and other local considerations can necessitate some modifications of the itinerary during the course of the tour; any chances will be made to make the best of the time, weather conditions and other constraints forced upon us and all changes will be made in conjunction with our terms and conditions.

Tour Inclusions

Absolutely everything mentioned in the above itinerary is included (except where it is expressly mentioned as an optional extra).

- All accommodation as mentioned above or of a similar standard as mentioned.
- All meals as mentioned in the itinerary; **please note that lunches and dinners are not included in Khabarovsk or Vladivostok but restaurants can be booked for you if you wish.**
- Bottled mineral or purified (boiled) water will be provided throughout and on request.
- Private vehicles for all transfers and excursions into the forest.
- Internal flight (Vladivostok – Khabarovsk) in economy class.
- Interpreters (English – Russian) provided from your arrival to departure.
- A tiger expert zoologist provided by Royle Safaris (where available).
- All fuel, tolls, taxes and other expenses relating to driving.
- All safari drives, hikes, and other tiger tracking activities as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Access to the special photography hide in Kedrova Pad National Park.
- National Park rangers in Kedrova Pad National Park.
- A Russian tiger expert and conservationist will be with you throughout your stay in the forest.
- The team is made up of the reserve manager who has been working with wildlife and tigers for over 40 years; his son, who is the camp cook and a team (between 1-4) of base camp staff who make sure that the stoves are hot, there is food available, toilets are emptied, cars are fuelled up, the banya is working each day and tend to the day to day operations of the base camp and reserve.
- All our reserve entrance fees and permits are also included.
- A selection of field guides and books of the local areas will be available on request from Alexander at the base camp.
- Also documentaries, pictures and videos about the local area are sometimes available (depending on the electricity usage in the areas we are camping).

Tour Exclusions

Nearly everything you will need is included in the price you have already paid for the tour. However there are some things not included.

- International flights to and from the tour start and end points.
- Travel insurance including any fees that result from emergency medical or evacuation needs.
- Visa fees for entering the country(s).
- Vaccinations and any medication are not included.
- Any food other than the meals provided and mentioned in the above itinerary; **please not that lunches and dinners in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok are not included.**
- Some meals will include a drink (such as juice, tea & coffee at breakfast) but most soft drinks and alcohol are an extra expense. Many people like to bring some alcohol, soft drinks, chocolate, crisps, biscuits to the best base camp, these are available in the super market before departure into the forest.
- Any items of a personal nature are not included, such as souvenirs, medication, toiletries, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips are also not included.
- Any departure taxes which may be due when leaving are not included (but may be included in the cost of your flights).