

NENETS

This Handbook contains everything you need to know about this cultural immersion Secret Compass expedition to [Siberia](#).

Read on to discover our ethos and team-centred approach and for the nitty gritty like flight and visa advice, insurance requirements and kit recommendations.

Use the buttons below to ask questions or if this handbook answers all of your questions you can request a space on the team by completing the [booking form](#) and submitting a deposit (bound by our [T&Cs](#)). We will then be in touch by phone or email to hopefully approve your place on the team!

Upcoming Expedition Dates

- 21 March 2021 to 06 April 2021

Key facts

- Arrive: by 1700 on Day 1 to the team hotel (Domodedovo Airhotel close to the airport).
- Depart: leave Moscow any time from 1800 on Day 17.
- Insurance: Ensure you have comprehensive cover.
- Balance due: 90 days before departure.
- Find [FAQ](#) and [Testimonials](#) online.

Overview

Aim

The aim of this culturally immersive expedition is to live and travel with Siberia's Nenets nomads and join them on their epic reindeer migration within the Arctic Circle. This journey offers cultural immersion of the highest calibre. Teammates will totally embed themselves with their hosts, wearing what the Nenets wear, eating what they eat and sleeping in their conical reindeer-hide tents called chums (pronounced 'chooms'). This is a rare opportunity to experience the unstaged reality of nomadic life out on the remote, freezing and unforgiving Yamal Peninsula.

Summary

Nenets live nomadically and usually migrate (move their camps) every few days to access fresh pasture for their reindeer. Twice a year the Nenets of the Yamal Peninsula also migrate their reindeer for 60km across the frozen Gulf of Ob, a bay of the Arctic Ocean. Conditions allowing, our expedition is timed to coincide with this event. This intense migration can take up to 24 hours, with the team keeping pace in all-terrain vehicles and sledges. With no pasture along the way it's a race to get to the other side before the reindeer become too weak from a lack of food. There will be no breaks for the herders, the vehicles, the animals or for you. The crossing of the Gulf is a feat of human and animal endurance which requires exacting conditions for the attempt. Should weather, migration patterns or other circumstances prevent the team from joining an Ob crossing, day-to-day Nenets life remains an awe-inspiring experience. The expedition culminates at the annual Reindeer Herding Festival in Yar Sale. The festival is a highlight in the Nenets calendar, offering the chance for different families to come together and for our team the opportunity to witness extraordinary events such as reindeer racing and traditional sports.

Highlights

- Cross a frozen gulf on an epic reindeer migration.
- Experience the Nenets nomads' unique way of life.
- Sleep in reindeer hide chums.

- Wear traditional herders' coats and boots.
- Experience the annual Reindeer Herding Festival.
- Travel by sledge, snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle.
- Look out for unusual Arctic flora and fauna.

To do

Flights

You need to organise your own international flights. It is advised that you book a flexible flight ticket that can be changed or refunded if the expedition dates are changed or if it is cancelled for any reason. See our online [Terms and Conditions](#). You need to be at the team hotel, close to Domodedovo Airport in Moscow by 1700 on Day 1, and the expedition officially ends on arrival back to Moscow on Day 17 at approximately 1100. If you are planning onwards travel today, please ensure you allow enough time for flight delays, collecting baggage and to transfer between domestic and international terminals or airports. To avoid any concerns over delays we recommend not booking flights to depart before 1800.

Note: due to scheduling changes our flight might return from Salekhard into Sheremetyevo airport not Domodedovo which is ~2 hour transfer time from Domodedovo. We will confirm arrangements once these flights are booked but recommend you leave ample time for the transfer in case this is required.

Authorisation Letter

You may need an authorisation letter (visa support letter) to apply for your Russian visa. These are usually processed in one working day through agencies such as [RealRussia](#) – the information you provide here must match your visa application.

Visas

Visas are your responsibility. Guidance is given below for British Nationals residing in the UK, for all other nationalities, please check your specific requirements. A comprehensive guide on visas and application letters will be sent out by Secret Compass nearer departure.

All applicants in the UK must apply in person and submit biometric data (scanned fingerprints) to the embassy. Fill out an online application through VFS Global, a company that processes applications on behalf of the Russian Embassy in London. Please [click here](#) to go to their website and follow the instructions carefully. You will then need to print out the application form and submit it IN PERSON to the processing centre, along with the supporting documents and biometric data. Applications take a minimum of 5 working days to process and there is the option for the embassy to return your documents by post for an additional fee.

In order to apply for a visa for Russia via the VFS Global application service you will need the following:

- Passport with at least six months validity after the visa expiration date and 2 blank pages.
- One Passport Photo.
- Completed application form from VFS Global.
- Visa support letter (authorisation letter).

Visa Service

Due to the requirement for biometric data for some nationalities, visa service companies may not be able to submit an application on your behalf.

Permits

All relevant tourist permits will be organised by Secret Compass.

Passports

You should have a passport valid for the duration of the expedition and your travel dates. Please send a clear, colour copy of your passport to Secret Compass before departure and carry photocopies with you on the expedition in a safe place.

If you're travelling on a British passport issued since January 2017, you should make sure you've signed your passport before you travel. Some British nationals who haven't signed their new passports have been denied entry into Russia.

Insurance

[Travel insurance](#) that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all expeditions. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a remote expedition and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. Secret Compass cannot comment on the suitability of your cover so if you are in any doubt please contact your policy provider and ask them to confirm that you are covered to our minimum standard (below).

- Emergency medical repatriation (to home country) including any associated expenses abroad of at least \$500,000.
- Activities: ensure that any expedition activities are included, these could be trekking, horse riding, rafting, MTB etc.
- Geographical region: check the geographical region you are going to is insured (often the US and Canada or countries such as Afghanistan are not insured).li>
- Foreign Ministry advice: check your insurance is not sensitive to any travel warnings issued by your respective foreign ministry. In the UK, many insurers will not insure you when the Foreign Office warns against travel to this area. Foreign Office advice will not necessarily mean we cancel an expedition or do not travel to a particular area. Please check @FCOtravel and the [Travel Aware](#) site.
- Dates: make sure the period of cover begins at the departure and ends at the return to your home country. Many flights take a day or two and time zones vary. Insurance companies may prejudice your claims due to this.
- Pre-existing medical conditions: disclose these to your insurance company and to Secret Compass.

Prior to travel Secret Compass will require the name of your insurance policy provider, their 24-hour emergency contact number and your policy number. For full information on travel insurance and links to suggested companies, please visit the [insurance page](#) on our website.

Itinerary

The itinerary detailed below has been created following the usual pattern for the reindeer herders festival, which is normally held on the first weekend of April. Occasionally the festival has been brought forward by a week at short notice. Should this happen, the following expedition itinerary covers both weekends and will remain flexible as to whether the bulk of the migration will occur before or after the festival.

Day 1 – Moscow

Arrive at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport and transfer to the Domodedovo Airhotel. The hotel is just a few hundred meters away from the airport and provides a free shuttle service. The expedition officially starts with a expedition briefing and dinner in the hotel at 1700, before getting a few hours sleep ahead of the flight to Salekhard.

Day 2 – Yar Sale

Early breakfast at the hotel before your 0300 Flight from Moscow's Domodedovo Airport to Salekhard will kick off a long day of travelling. You'll then transfer to Trekol all-terrain vehicles at Salekhard airport for the 7 hours drive along the frozen surface of the River Ob to reach Yar Sale village. Snacks on the way, dinner upon arrival.

Day 3– Nomads Camp

After breakfast, the team will collect local clothing before travelling in wooden box sledges attached to snowmobiles from Yar Sale to the nomad encampment in the heart of the tundra. From the moment of arrival at the settlement, all meals will be with the nomadic families.

Day 4-12 – Migration

The team will join in with daily life amongst the reindeer herders. Every few days the Nenets will move onto fresh pastures, dismantling the chums, packing sledges and rounding up the reindeer. When the conditions are right, the extended family of nomads will decide to make the full crossing of the Gulf of Ob, this must be done in one go as there is no forage for the reindeer on the frozen surface. Depending on the weather conditions and terrain, this crossing has been known to take up to 24 hours.

Day 13 – Yar Sale

The team returns to Yar Sale (and the luxury of showers) on the snowmobile-drawn sledges. Dinner in the hotel.

Day 14-15 – Reindeer Festival

The Reindeer Herder festival – reindeer herders from many different camps will gather in the Yar Sale village to take part in traditional sports such as reindeer sledge racing, Nenets wrestling, sledge jumping, stick tug-of-war, lassoing and so on. For relatives living in camps whose migration routes do not cross, this is the one time of year they get to see each other as well as an important opportunity for young people to look for potential spouses. You'll spend two days at the festival, soaking up the atmosphere and watching the activities, making the return journey by ATV to Salekhard on the afternoon of the 2nd day.

Day 16 – Free Day

Breakfast at the hotel. Today serves as a contingency day in case of bad weather preventing travel from Yar Sale. It's also a great opportunity to re-acclimatise before your return to Moscow. The team may choose to visit some of the town's excellent museums, the 16th century fortress of Obdursk or visit the market square where you can find a selection of crafts and furs.

Day 17 – Moscow

Breakfast in the hotel. Transfer to Salekhard airport to arrive at Moscow around 1100. The expedition ends on arrival back to Moscow. If you are planning onwards travel today, please ensure that you allow enough time for flight delays and to transfer to your international flight (collecting baggage, passing through security and potentially transferring airports. Please note: due to flight scheduling it is possible that our domestic flight will return into Moscow Sheremetyevo rather than Moscow Domodedovo airport. We will confirm this as soon as possible once the expedition is confirmed.

About Secret Compass Itineraries

Please remember that this itinerary acts as a framework plan. It provides guidance as to our intentions but may not be followed religiously. This is an adventure and by definition the outcome is uncertain. The leadership team will adapt, flex and change the plan depending on the numerous frictions you may encounter along the way.

Prepare

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. The biggest challenge on this culturally immersive expedition will be dealing with the Arctic weather conditions, the unusual and limited diet and the totally different lifestyle. There will be long days of travel in sometimes cramped and uncomfortable wooden box sledges. Though teammates will help around the camp, there'll also be down time between migrations.

Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition's success so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go. Teammates must be comfortable with the following.

- [Expedition Grade](#): 270°.
- Trek: short distances around camps and to collect wood.
- Strength: help to carry water, chop wood, push sledges, put up chums.
- Terrain: icy tundra, snow, frozen lakes.
- Snowshoe: there may be chances to snowshoes around camp.
- Climate: deal with temperatures down to -40C with howling Arctic winds.

Money

The standard currency in Russia is Roubles. US Dollars can be changed easily at Domodedovo airport. There are plenty of ATMs in Salekhard on your return but we recommend taking cash for Yar Sale with you from Moscow. This expedition is all-inclusive so you won't need much cash except for buying beer and souvenirs along the way. Salekhard has a number of museums, markets and shops (boots, furs etc) so it may be worth budgeting for a little shopping or sightseeing.

Secret Compass always suggest carrying an emergency fund of \$100-\$200 in cash.

Medical

Vaccinations. Please seek advice from your health professional on recommended vaccinations. The NHS [Fit For Travel](#) site and [Travel Health Pro](#) are both useful.

Dental. It is strongly recommended that you have a dental check up prior to departure. Dental problems far from help are very unpleasant.

Challenges

Unlike many Secret Compass expeditions, the major challenges of this expedition is mainly one of cultural immersion rather than physical exertion. Previous experience with the Nenets has taught us there will be plenty of down-time during your stay, with many lengthy journeys made in vehicles or on sledges rather than on foot. The biggest challenges of this expedition are the cold conditions and the unusual diet and lifestyle.

You should be prepared to join in with camp chores and daily life, be comfortable moving about uneven terrain and carrying loads around camp. It is not unusual for the herders to travel in cramped box sledges for over 24 hours during the final migration across the Gulf of Ob with smaller, regular migrations still taking several hours with few chances to stop and stretch your legs. The Nenets do not migrate every day so some time will be spent in camp where you have the opportunity to quiz your hosts about their culture, history and lifestyle.

You must be prepared physically and mentally for the expedition and for living in basic conditions for its duration.

Please ensure that you are prepared for this expedition and send any questions to Secret Compass.

Communications

Home to You. Secret Compass will have an Ops Room manned in the UK throughout your expedition. If your family need to get in touch with you due to an EMERGENCY your family can call the Ops Room on +44 (0) 207 096 8428. The Ops Room will ensure the message gets to the expedition within 24 hours. Unfortunately we are unable to pass routine messages between your family members and you.

You to Home. Secret Compass will have satellite phones for emergency use only and these cannot be used for personal messages home unless in extremis. Please reassure your family that we have their contact details (NOK information provided on your Booking Form) and that no news is good news.

Cell Phone. Your mobile roaming may work in towns but expect the signal to be intermittent. The Moscow hotel has Wi-Fi and a business centre.

Kit list

The following is the Secret Compass recommended kit list our expedition to Siberia. Some items are essential so please read carefully and direct any questions to Secret Compass. Suggested products and technologies are included at the end of the kit list. These items are a guide only – you do not need to purchase these exact products although we have mentioned tried and trusted brands.

Discounts

Secret Compass have arranged team member discounts with Cotswold Outdoor, Nordic Life, Outdoor Hire and Expedition Kit Hire, details of these will be sent through on booking.

KIT LIST

Although you will be provided with traditional Nenets jackets and boots for the majority of the expedition, you will need your own extreme cold weather clothing (see advice below) for travelling in and to wear during the festival. Please see the bottom of this kit list for extensive clothing advice and contact Secret Compass with any questions.

Baggage and Sleeping

- RUCKSACK/SOFT DUFFEL BAG: 120 litres maximum for storing your personal equipment during the migration. Essential kit such as sleeping bags and boots will be kept with you at all times.
- LOCKABLE BAG (optional): A small bag may be left in Yar Sale with clothes for the festival/travel.
- SLEEPING BAG: Rated to at least a 'comfort' of -40C and in a waterproof stuff sack.
- WATERPROOF WALLET: For your passport and money.

Clothing

- 1 x INSULATED TROUSERS: Chest-high/Bib-style insulated trousers with drop seat – see 'Insulated trousers' section below.
- 2 x THERMAL BASE LAYER: Top and bottoms – synthetic or merino wool. NO COTTON!
- 1 x MID LAYER (optional): Fleece or equivalent, layers are key in maintaining a comfortable temperature on the tundra. Reindeer hair is incredibly hard to remove from fleece items so don't bring new or hired fleeces.
- 1 x DOWN JACKET: Expedition quality – please see your detailed kit information below.
- 1 x LIGHTWEIGHT WATERPROOF SHELL: To protect your down jacket from getting wet which would greatly reduce its insulation properties.
- 2 x HIKING SOCKS: Warm and comfortable, consider wool.

- 1 x WARM BOOTS: Insulated boots with a sturdy sole and good grip. Make sure they fit well with your socks and are comfortable. Baffin or Sorel type.
- WARM HAT.
- BALACLAVA: Raised above the nose and mouth to stop it freezing from the moisture in your breath.
- INNER GLOVES.
- WATER-PROOF OUTER GLOVES: With reinforced palm if possible.
- 2x UNDERWEAR (optional): Lycra sports shorts don't chafe and dry quickly.

Eating

- WATER BOTTLE: Insulated water bottle – or normal water bottle in insulated sleeve. We will provide thermoses for the team on travel days.
- SNACKS: Snack bars, trail mix or similar to supplement and for long days on migration. Items containing prunes or fibre are recommended.

Health and Hygiene

- WASHBAG, TOOTHBRUSH & TOOTHPASTE (optional): Ensure it breaks down small. You do not need a large travel washbag – sealable freezer bags or a small dry bag work well.
- LIP SALVE WITH UV PROTECTION: This is essential as chapped lips are painful.
- FACTOR 30+ SUN CREAM.
- SANITARY PRODUCTS (optional): Bring a supply of perfumed nappy sacks as there will be nowhere to dispose of used items until you return to Yar Sale.

Small First Aid Kit

- ANY MEDICATION YOU NORMALLY USE: It may be useful to find out the generic/chemical name for the medication in case you need to source more in country. Please also check whether your particular medication is legal in your destination.

Other

- HEAD TORCH AND SPARE BATTERIES.
- SUNGLASSES WITH UV-FILTER LENSES.
- SKI GOGGLES.
- KNIFE: For eating and camp chores (around 10cm). Remember: DO NOT pack in hand luggage.
- CHEMICAL HANDWARMER: Enough for one per day whilst on expedition. Not the type which need boiling to re-activate.

Base Layers

These will be worn next to your skin and perform 2 main functions; insulating you and wicking moisture away from your skin to keep you dry and warm. Synthetic baselayers tend to be thinner and cheaper, good at wicking moisture but they don't offer as much warmth as wool. A more detailed comparison can be found [here](#).

[Icebreaker](#) merino wool. Merino is softer than 'traditional' wool and naturally anti-microbial (meaning it won't start to smell!). They offer different 'weights' of clothing – this is basically how thick and therefore how warm the layers are. The bigger the number, the more wool is used in each metre of fabric.

Another brand offering merino wool baselayers is [Smartwool](#) – these are thinner and lighter than the Icebreaker equivalent but they do excellent [socks](#) (make sure they fit with your boots – if your socks are too thick your boots will feel tight and you'll restrict blood flow).

If you are not a fan of wool next to your skin, try the [Helly Hansen](#) Warm series – this combines their synthetic wicking layer 'lifa' with a merino outer coating for the best of both. This may smell a bit more over time in

comparison to the pure merino options but with everyone in the same boat no one will comment. Also consider [Rab MeCo](#) (merino and polyester blend) or silk ([SilkBody](#)).

Mid Layers

Mid layers for both top and bottom will be essential. These can be a second, thicker layer of merino wool or a fleece layer.

Many brands (including [Rab](#), [North Face](#) and [Marmot](#)) use Powerstretch in their products. The result is a stretchy, fairly close-fitting fleece that is great for layering. The close-knit outer surface means it slides easily when putting extra layers on top whilst in its own right it helps to cut wind and keeps you warmer than a traditional fleece of the same weight.

Normal fleece can also be used as a mid-layer but look for at least 200weight (not a 'microfleece'). A 260gm or 300gm merino layer is another option for a mid-layer, just make sure it's not too tight on top of your baselayer.

Down Jackets

A down jacket is essential. A normal ski or casual down jacket simply won't be warm enough, especially whilst travelling when activity levels are low. You need to be comfortable at -40°C which means it will need to be an expedition quality down jacket – check the label carefully for the down quantity. This is literally how many kg of down feathers are in your jacket and the down fill (the quality of the down, the higher the better as this will dictate how much the down 'lofts' and traps air – therefore heat). Standard is around 700/800 and 900 or even 1000 is available at a premium, though keep in mind USA and European measurements sometimes vary.

Invest in a dry bag to protect your down jacket when you're not wearing it – if it gets wet the down will clump and lose the insulating properties. If you dislike using animal products or are allergic to down, synthetic options are available but much harder to come by, much heavier and don't pack as small.

The [Annapurna](#) jacket ([Cho Oyu](#) is the ladies equivalent) from Mountain Equipment has been a staple of polar travel for years – make sure you can fit your other layers underneath it without restricting the loft of the down jacket. It is designed with a low cut back to protect you whilst sitting and walking.

[Rab](#) offer a selection of down jackets, avoid anything 'microlight' and go straight for the expedition offerings like the Batura, Andes or Neutrino Plus.

If you want a jacket that is perfect for you – PHD offer a [custom-build jacket](#). You can choose your down fill (900 fill is available), body and arm length, zip type, hood etc. Great if you envisage yourself using the jacket again and struggle to fit a standard offering.

Insulated Trousers

For super warm insulated trousers check out the [Fitzroy](#) or [Prophet](#) from Mountain Equipment. These are bib-style insulated trousers with reinforcements at the ankle and bottom.

For cheaper options you can look at insulated, water resistant salopettes – these need to be a bib-style, chest high design and big enough to wear both your base layers and mid layers beneath them without the fabric pulling tight across your leg (this can lead to a condition called polar thigh which is very unpleasant). Insulation in this layer is essential so avoid only waterproof 'shells'. Side zips or a drop seat make bathroom trips easier as you don't have to battle all of your layers. For the ladies, it may also be worth checking out a [shewee](#).

Boots

As with everything else, these boots must keep you warm at temperatures as low as -40°C. Hiking boots or ski boots are not suitable. The key to these boots keeping you warm is not having them tight fitting. Please be aware

that if you have poor circulation and often have cold feet then it's worth investing in boots that suggest a -70-100 rating as they often over compensate how warm they actually are.

[Baffin](#) offer a range of boots designed for polar environments. The removable liner boot is great if your boots get damp as they'll dry faster than all-in-one options.

[Sorel](#) also make boots which are a staple on polar expeditions and for arctic travel. Watch out for their 'fashion' boots! These may look nice but lack insulation and good grip. Instead go for a model like the Glacier.

[Salomon Toundra Mid WP](#). These boots can keep you warm down to -40°C using Aerogels insulation. Ice grip and a waterproof lining plus a comfy heel foam make these a light weight but lower cut option.

Sleeping Bags

This needs to be rated to a comfort of -40°C. If you normally 'sleep cold' or are a slim lady using a men's sleeping bag you may need a warmer bag than this (women-specific bags are slightly shorter and narrower so there is less 'dead space' around you inside the bag). Invest in a waterproof stuff sack to protect your bag and keep it dry. For travelling, please purchase a compression system if it doesn't originally come with one ([compression dry bags](#) from Sea to Summit are ideal).

[Alpkit](#) make several expedition standard sleeping bags including the Arctic Dream 1400 which is a great value down-filled sleeping bag.

[Rab](#) will be more easily available and do a huge range of '5 season' expedition bags – look for the Expedition 1400 for a comfort rating of -40°C.

The North Face is another brand to investigate – the [Summit Series Inferno -40](#) bag would be suitable and has a really handy central zip.

If you have any questions about suitable expedition equipment or would like advice on hiring or purchasing products, please contact info@secretcompass.com. Expedition team members are eligible for discounts through our partners Cotswold Outdoor, Nordic Life, Expedition Kit Hire and Outdoor Hire, more details and discount codes will be found in your MySC team member area on booking.

Approach

Our Approach

Secret Compass organises expeditions, not sightseeing tours. Our expeditions are team-centred, flexible and dynamic. Teams are managed on the ground by Secret Compass staff: industry-leading professionals and guides of the highest calibre. They put the structure in place for your team to have an incredible experience while achieving your expedition's aims. Our people are as passionate as you are about achieving the extraordinary in the world's wildest places. Secret Compass teams often go to places that others don't. This makes our expeditions truly different, taking you beneath the skin and beyond the headlines of the world's most remote reaches. Inspired by history's great explorers and challenges, you'll be set ambitious goals and will overcome similar hardships to those experienced on the audacious journeys of the past.

Remember this is not an organised tour. It is an adventure. More often than not expeditions don't run smoothly! The nature of the areas we operate in mean that we will encounter a number of challenges that we expect everyone to meet and relish. Friction and hurdles are all part and parcel of an arduous expedition and also to our success as a team. These make the journey more interesting and are often the best and most amusing parts when looking back. Each expedition is thoroughly reviewed on its return and team members will have the opportunity to provide feedback which helps to inform planning for future expeditions.

Local Partners and Bureaucracy

Our teammates can only achieve the extraordinary with the help of people in the communities we travel through. NGO and aid workers, guides, fixers and interpreters all work extremely hard and are generous in their hospitality to us and our teams: visitors in their land. They are crucial to our success. Please remember and respect that their perspectives and concepts of time, environmental responsibility and customer service might differ to yours. Occasionally there is no established protocol for outside visitors which means we encounter local power struggles or disagreements. Our leaders have years of experience in delicate negotiations like these and conversational chess – especially through an interpreter – and these interchanges are often memorable parts of any expedition.

Infrastructure and Natural Events

The areas we travel to often especially remote. Transport infrastructure can be ageing, inadequate or non-existent. Flooded roads, collapsed bridges, fallen trees and vehicle break-downs are all par for the course. Our teams thrive on overcoming challenges like these – be prepared to get stuck in and push occasionally! Natural phenomena like desert sand storms, early monsoons, landslides across key routes, winter coming early, gale force winds and driving snow can all make for a more interesting time on the expedition.

Food

In some areas our teams explore, we rely on local food sources. This can often be outstanding (but can also be very average) and we always make the best out of the resources available. In other cases, we will supply filling and high-calorie dehydrated expedition foods (ration packs)

Part of a Team

Secret Compass fosters a team mentality across all its expeditions and projects. Like all teams you will have a leader who will give direction to your progress. Crucial to your team's success – especially when the going gets tough – is the attitude of the teammates working together to achieve the aim. You really are part of a team, not a cosseted guest on a tour. We ask teammates to muck in and help out any aspect of the expedition, from fetching water and helping to prepare and cook food, to carrying some group kit and equipment if required. The working language of all teams is English.

Typical Teammates

There really is no typical expedition member, though everyone needs to be fit, healthy and ready to take on the expedition's aim by the time of departure. Participants range from 21 to 65+ in age and come from all over the world. Backgrounds include contract workers and engineers, IT specialists and students, teachers and literature lovers, journalists and keen photographers and so many more. What bonds our pioneering teams is their shared spirit of adventure and their sense of humour and positive outlook.

A good teammate looks on the bright side when the 4x4 breaks down, the rain comes early and when a meal is distinctly pedestrian. Our teammates help each other, look out for each, encourage each other and help each other when needed. Our teams have done us proud in working together to achieve their common goal: the aim of the expedition. If this sounds like you, you've come to the right expedition company.

Teammate Mentality

You need a robust, spirited and can-do attitude to cope with demanding days and rough camping in rugged and wild places. You'll cover good daily distances (generally carrying your own kit and equipment), eating expedition foods or relying on local food sources. These elements combine to create the unique character of each expedition. On expedition, challenges, frictions and changes to plans are inevitable. Teammates should meet and relish these as an integral part of any arduous expedition and its ultimate success. Such things make the journey more interesting and are often most memorable parts when looking back.

Risk Management

Secret Compass is an expedition company not a tour company. Expeditions contain inherent risk. This is part of the appeal for teammates. We do not make expeditions safe as, by definition, that is impossible. We construct and implement a three-staged risk management approach to reduce risk to what we perceive as a tolerable level.

1. Risk assessment.

We conduct a thorough risk assessment of potential hazards and threats that may be encountered on the expedition and provide recommendations to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring/ severity if it does occur.

2. Safety plan.

As part of our expedition plan, we detail actions to be taken to implement and resource the recommendations of the risk assessment. This includes a detailed medical and communications plan.

3. Delivery.

The expedition leader is responsible for dynamic risk management on the expedition itself.

Key Risks.

Key risks encountered on this specific expedition include climatic injuries such as hypothermia and frostbite, driving accidents whilst on snowmobiles and injuries caused by herding animals. If you would like to see the full Risk Assessment for this expedition, please email info@secretcompass.com

Incident Management and Medical

As part of the safety plan, Secret Compass has a full incident and emergency plan for medical and other emergencies. This will be discussed in full at the arrival brief, so everyone is aware what action will be taken. In summary, incidences are usually managed on the ground by the expedition leader in the first instance with remote support from Secret Compass's 24 hour Operations Room before evacuation to the nearest appropriate medical centre.

Informed Consent

It is your responsibility to understand the risks associated with adventure travel in remote areas. You also must understand that medical evacuation will take an extended period of time (potentially over 24 hours) and will require wilderness extraction techniques and long carries by stretcher. In-country search and rescue and emergency services are very basic or non-existent and the expedition will rely on internal resources for medical evacuation. By joining this expedition, you accept the risks associated with the venture. If you require any more information on specific risk management for this expedition, or would like to speak to us about our medical planning prior to the trip, please get in touch.

Testimonials

Read team [Testimonials](#) or watch this short video featuring expedition teammates (filmed on location in Ethiopia) for an insight into life on expedition.

On exped

Food

The main constituents of the Nenets' nomads diet is raw, frozen meat and fish. Sometimes raw, sometimes cooked, sometimes on its own. Life in the tundra can be very calorie intensive and as much of their days is spent

running around after the reindeer from dawn till dusk, the nomads usually eat at least 5 times a day. Team members will be eating what and when their hosts do, so don't expect a choice at meals or food on demand. You may want to bring snacks to supplement meals during long days, it would be polite to occasionally offer to share these with your hosts. In town we will be eating well in hotels and local restaurants.

Vegetarians or people who will not eat raw fish or meat will need to bring dehydrated ration packs (one per day). These should be of the 'add boiling water' variety and you should be aware of the cultural sensitivities of your hosts when mixing and eating them. Coeliacs may also wish to bring their own ration packs as many meals are accompanied by bread and there is no other alternative.

Water is in limited supply as it depends on the availability of the water source. You will be able to consume most of your water intake as black tea but it is not unusual to be slightly dehydrated by your normal standards. During the migration days, the Nenets fill up flasks to take on the journey, Secret Compass will provide flasks for these occasions.

Weather

March is the beginning of the spring in Yamal and temperatures will be somewhere between 0 and -40C. There is also a massive wind chill factor on the tundra from the howling winds blowing down the bay from the Arctic Ocean.

Alcohol

We all know that drinking vodka is a favourite Russian past time, and as such our hosts may invite you to drink with them at the end of a hard day's work around camp or on migration. Teammates are welcome to partake or abstain as they wish. As in most communities, this is at the discretion of each host family and so two teammates staying with different families on the same expedition might have different experiences. It is important to be culturally sensitive, and to remember that some of these communities have been negatively impacted by alcohol. Unless invited by our hosts, we should ourselves refrain from drinking, which will hopefully leave a better impression of westerners and help to reduce any cultural impact on the Nenets communities. For this reason, we do not encourage bringing your own alcohol onto the tundra – our team leader will supply any gifts for the host families, although if you wish to bring any non-alcoholic gifts from home, these are always welcome.

Terrain

This is not a migration on foot or skis so prepare for long journeys over tundra and ice in occasionally cramped or uncomfortable sledges pulled by motorised vehicles.

Dress

The Nenets ladies will always wear dresses but they will not expect their guests to. Women cannot wear men's boots. Dress warm, a four-layer system of base layer, mid layer, fleece and down jacket is tried and tested. Essentials and further details can be found in your kit list at the end of this document.

Transport

You need to organise your own international flights.

Secret Compass will arrange internal flights from Moscow Domodedovo to Salekhard. On the ground we will be travelling mainly on a frozen river surface from Salekhard airport to Yar Sale village in Trekol all-terrain vehicles (which should float should a subsidence occur). The return transfer will follow the same arrangement.

The team will travel between the Nomad encampment and Yar Sale village in wooden box sledges pulled behind snow mobiles. Whilst migrating with the Nenets, transport will be on sledges and snowmobiles. Sledge travel can be very cramped – team members might be sitting down, with their knees hunched in front for extended periods of time on bumpy, uneven terrain. Previous team mates have found this to be the most challenging part of the

expedition; the physical and mental strain of this unique experience should not be underestimated.

Accommodation

Moscow: [Domodedovo 4* Airhotel](#) is a modern hotel 500m from the passenger terminal at Domodedovo airport with a free shuttle service. Extra nights can be booked here for outside of the Secret Compass itinerary and they can store luggage if necessary.

Yar Sale Village: Comfortable accommodation in twin or triple rooms with shared facilities which will feel luxurious after your time on the tundra.

On expedition: Chums (pronounced chooms) – conical reindeer hide tents that are the traditional dwellings of the Nenets nomads. This structure consists of reindeer hides wrapped around a circle of wooden poles, in the centre is a hearth and a smoke hole. When arriving at a new campsite after a migration, the head of a nomadic camp will place his khorei (herding stick) in the ground where he wants the centre of his chum to be and the rest of the group will then set up chums to the left (from behind) with all the entrances facing the same way. You will be split into groups depending on the size of the family group you are staying with and the capacity of their chum, nights may be spent sharing vodka and snuggling down in your sleeping bags and reindeer furs. You may also be sharing the chum with their dogs and any handreared reindeer.

Salekhard: A modern hotel close to the airport with twin rooms.

Reality of living rough for days. Occasionally people on our expeditions are not prepared for camping for multiple days. Living in these conditions can degrade your health if you do not look after yourself and increase fatigue if you are not used to living rough. You need to be highly organised so that your night and morning routine is done efficiently and quickly. If you are inexperienced at camping, it is essential that you get as much practice as possible prior to the expedition. This expedition is going to be particularly tough as you will be living in very different surroundings, eating a different diet and helping the Nenets with key daily tasks in very cold environments.

Leader

You will be in very safe hands with an experienced western guide who is wilderness first aid trained and has extensive experience of trekking, working and operating in remote environments. The team will also be accompanied by an interpreter/nomad liaison who will help you to communicate and connect with the Nenets herders.

Team mates must also be aware that due to the nature of this expedition, risk management by your expedition leader throughout the expedition will be dynamic, evolving and affected by uncontrollable human factors. The team is reliant on their Nenets hosts whilst they are simultaneously responsible for managing their reindeer livestock. Their reindeer are their livelihood and for the Nenets the needs of their livestock will (almost) always supersede that of our team. Additionally, the behaviour and planning of the Nenets can be spontaneous, unpredictable and often poorly or not communicated. Team mates need to be aware and comfortable with this.

Cultural

The information below has been provided by our local partners, both to educate team members about the culture in which they will be living, but also to answer the questions many people have about appropriate behaviour and local beliefs amongst the Nenets nomads.

Gender Roles

In Nenets society, men and women are viewed as equals but completely different. It is widely recognized that a man cannot survive in the tundra without a woman, and that a woman cannot survive without a man. This is

because the main aspect of tundra life is constant back-breaking work with no time off, and neither gender could manage the work of two genders. Work is therefore very strictly divided between the genders.

While men work in the tundra with the reindeer, women's duties include everything to do with the home, food, and clothing. This separation is demonstrated visually almost every day by various aspects of Nenets life:

1. Men will go out to the herd, catch a reindeer, bring it back to the chum and kill it. However, the minute it is dead it becomes food for the family, and it is women's duty to cut it up and preserve the different cuts of meat.
2. Men go out into the tundra to cut trees and bring them back to the chum. Once there it usually becomes women's work to chop up it into firewood to heat the stove with.
3. When moving camp, men drive single sledges or snowmobiles, herding the reindeer. Women drive long caravans of up to ten sledges connected together, on which the chum and all the family's possessions and food are loaded.

These are a general set of rules, and the majority of the time they are adhered to. However, survival in the tundra is the most important thing, so if there are not enough women for the sledge caravans, a man may drive one, or if the woman is too busy to chop firewood, the man may help out. Likewise, when the man is lassoing reindeer for sledges, the woman may stand nearby, take the reindeer off his hands as soon as he has caught them and lead them to tie to a sledge. She will never, however, use a lasso. That is strictly man's work. Likewise a man will never sew fur clothing or sew chum covers.

In general the woman's work is to keep her family warm by sewing new bedding, clothes and chum covers as often as possible, heating the chum as often as possible, and being ready at any moment of the day to put a meal and tea on the table as soon as the men ask for it.

Children

Neither gender spends much time bringing up children. This is partly because they are kept so busy, but partly because children are supposed to grow up independent and unspoiled by the attention of their parents. Small children are tied to the chum poles by a rope at all times. They live like this until they figure out how to untie the rope themselves, usually around age three. Then they are free to go wherever they want inside or outside the chum. Sometimes on a busy day you will see a small child fall over in the snow and be unable to stand up again due to the weight of their fur clothing. They may spend hours screaming and freezing in the snow, adults just walking by and neither paying attention or helping. This helps the children become self-sufficient and not to rely on others in this harsh environment. It is considered that adults should never play with children, and only help them if they are in very serious need.

Sya Mei

One major aspect of women's lives is sya mei. This is a force from the world of birth and death which certain people in this world can be "carriers" of, and which can be very harmful if not respected and if certain rules are broken. People affected by sya mei include anyone connected with birth and death: newborn children, people who have recently been at a funeral, and all post-pubescent women. All these people have a large number of restrictions on them, and have to watch their behaviour very carefully.

Women for example are not allowed to touch the sacred sledge, they must not step over or sit on lassos, ropes or harnesses. They must not cross an imaginary line which runs from the central pole in the chum to the sacred pole at the back of the chum and out into the tundra while still in sight of the chum. They cannot visit sacred sites or participate in sacrifices. They must not cut certain fish, cross the tracks of bears which are considered sacred, step over a pregnant dog or remove the womb of a pregnant reindeer that is being cut up for meat for example.

It is the lower, birth-giving part of a woman's body that is affected by sya mei, hence stepping over things is often an important feature of these taboos. Paying attention, you will see Nenets women lifting ropes and harnesses over

their heads as they walk around camp every day, whereas men just step over them.

Likewise, it is a grave sin and dangerous offence for women to wear men's reindeer fur boots, but wearing men's reindeer fur jackets is fine. Women must never step over men lying down in the chum, and must not even hang up their fur boots to dry in the chum as this may result in a man passing under them. There is a special sledge kept outside the chum where women can hang their fur boots if they need to dry them.

Sya mei has been incorrectly translated as "uncleanliness" by some Russian anthropologists, and the special sledge outside the chum has been incorrectly named "the filthy sledge" in Russian. This has led outsiders unfamiliar with Nenets culture to think mistakenly that women in Nenets society are inferior. This is not the case. Sya mei is an extremely powerful force, intrinsic to life itself, and represents women's central role in Nenets life.

Shamanism

Shamanism is still practised in parts of the tundra but only in very small groups. Nenets have an animist belief system centred on the local deities that are represented by dolls that they carry on sacred sledges. Several times a season the sacred sledge is also anointed with freshly slaughtered reindeer blood, but on the whole the local deities should be left in peace. The Yamal tundra is also covered by a close network of sacred sites (usually to the far north) and the wooden dolls from the sacred sledges are sometimes exchanged in these places. The ancient Nenets ancestral knowledge is kept alive through folklore that is acted out through legends and songs.

Ethics

The Nenets of the Yamal Peninsula are slightly different from other nomadic groups. In the 1930s the Soviet government enforced schooling on the Nenets children. This means that the majority of Nenets children have been educated (at boarding schools away from the camps). However, the Yamal Nenets culture is so strong that many of the young people return to the tundra, taking what they want from mainstream society without letting it affect their cultural identity. They experience both worlds then make a choice, 50% choosing one way of life (nomadism) and 50% the other (a settled life in Yamal Peninsula villages). Those that choose life as a nomad do so because this is the life that they want, not because they have to. Guests will input money directly into the communities, which is then used to buy necessary provisions and tools and increase the size of their reindeer herd.

Exped FAQ

I'm a vegetarian. Can I join?

Teammates with dietary requirements are welcome to apply for this expedition and should state their specific requirements when applying. The food situation is outlined in the Practicalities tab. Those unable or unwilling to eat as the Nenets eat may be required to bring their own suitable alternative.

Can I ski alongside the reindeer?

While skiing is part of the Nenets' culture – the men sometimes use traditional wooden skis with leather bindings to hunt or to get around the forest – teammates skiing alongside the caravan is not possible. While a given family may have the odd pair of skis that can be tried out, skiing is not a part of this expedition.

Will I have to eat raw reindeer?

Teammates do not have to eat raw reindeer as the Nenets will, though it is an integral part of their culture. Previous expedition teammates have surprised themselves with even vegetarians becoming so immersed in the experience that they ate (and drank) from freshly killed raw reindeer along with everyone else.

As long as cultural sensitivity prevails, teammates can join in or not though it should be remembered that this is

intended as a culturally immersive expedition, with everything that entails.

Can I hire some kit items in country?

It is challenging to hire kit in country. All teammates are advised to procure all necessary kit prior to arrival in Moscow. Secret Compass can advise teammates on hire options but cannot bring kit out to Moscow for teammates.

Will there be telephone signal?

There will be phone signal while in Moscow, at Salekhard and at Yar Sale. Once on migration, expect no reception and if some does fleetingly appear, treat that as a plus. Being happy to escape 'the outside world' to become fully immersed in this expedition is a great approach.

Can I charge electricals?

This will be very challenging with limited access to power. Please ensure that you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries or power packs to avoid frustration.

Will my camera work in the cold?

Battery life is a challenge in very cold climates such as Siberia's Arctic Circle! If camera or phone battery life is of paramount importance, research the best ways to protect and keep your batteries warm and come equipped accordingly.

Can I bring a drone?

Secret Compass have worked extensively on the Yamal peninsula with film crews and are aware of the extremely bureaucratic and prolonged process to receive approval for the use of drones. Whilst we have successfully applied for drone permits in the past, we are not aware of approvals for touristic/personal use being approved.

Can I arrive a day late?

As The Plan outlines, there is a complex chain of transport to get teammates out to the Nenets and so start and end dates are not flexible.

It's Russia. Will there be vodka?

At the end of a hard day's work around camp or on migration, some Nenets families indulge in that classic Russian activity – vodka drinking. Teammates are welcome to partake or abstain – indeed the toasts might even be in their honour. As in any community, such activity is family dependant and so two teammates staying with different families on the same expedition might have different experiences. In order to be respectful to the families we stay with, any drinking should be initiated by the hosts and therefore we ask team members to not bring their own booze on to the tundra. This is honest nomadic life after all, with all the variations found in any extended family unit or small community.

Do you provide further advice?

You might find our [Get Ready](#) section useful, with further advice about fitness, flights, travel insurance, visas and our approach to risk management.

How can I join the team?

If you feel that the Handbook answers all your questions, you can request a space on the team by completing the [booking form](#) and submitting a deposit.

