



**«Absolute Siberia» Events & Expeditions Bureau:
Responsible Journeys to Lake Baikal, Siberia and Beyond...**





«Absolute Siberia» Ltd. Events & Expeditions Bureau

Dear traveler!

It is my pleasure to greet you personally, on behalf of Absolute Siberia Ltd. staff who has been involved in the international travel industry of Russia for over 30 years.

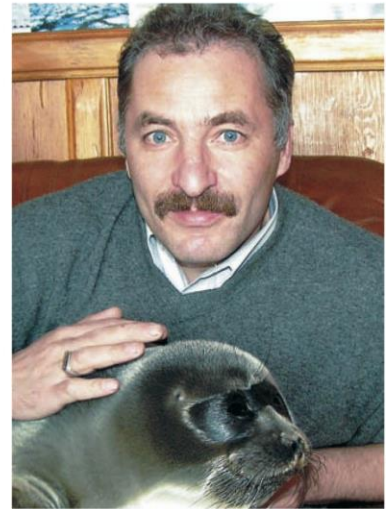
Our company was designed as Siberia's Bureau of Events & Expeditions. We love developing tours & maintain a well-earned reputation of creating good events, international festivals some of which have already gained world - wide recognition. We run our tour products well with sustainability principles in mind providing fascinating educational experiences in a fun and relaxed environment. One of our goals is to find extraordinary ways to connect you with nature and local people.

We have pioneered international eco-tourism in the area of so-called «Baikal & Mongolia Asia» destination connecting two Great twin lakes of Northern Asia: Baikal and Khovsgol. A great number of curious and adventurous people who respect cultural heritage and treasure the natural world have since been attracted and went on our off-the-beaten path journeys to this area of the world's largest fresh-water basin.

We live on the shores of Holy Lake Baikal - Well of the Planet Earth, the World's Treasure. And we really want to responsibly show you more of the beautiful Lake Baikal and that of Siberia. And in doing this we will help ensure you enjoy your stay.

Please, be our guests!

*Alexei NIKIFOROV,
«Absolute Siberia», Founder and Managing Director*





«Absolute Siberia» Events & Expeditions Bureau



What We Offer and Provide

- ◇ Off the beaten path journeys in the world's largest fresh-water basin area of Baikal and Siberia;
- ◇ Cultural, Wildlife Trips & Expeditions to the last frontiers of Baikal and Mongolia Asia;
- ◇ Short break holidays tailored to meet your personal needs and your planned trip's logistics;
- ◇ VIP-travel services, corporate leisure arrangements and team-building tour packages;
- ◇ Special travel arrangements including ground handling services of your special charter flights.

The Way We Travel & Operate Tours for You

◇ We do responsible travel in Baikal & Mongolia Asia, Siberia. On «Absolute Siberia» itineraries you can experience shaman rituals or meet them in private, spend an excellent vacation at real Siberian horse farm, hear Tuvan throat-singers, enjoy a comfortable cruise on Lake Baikal, see a variety of flora and fauna in Russian and Mongolian nature preserve areas, view great marine and coastal wildlife on journeys to the Shantar Islands or Russia's Far Eastern tiger reserves, observe fresh-water seals and brown bears in Baikal wildlife sanctuaries, spend one-of-a-kind

winter vacation in Siberia during «Winteriada» Baikal Nordic Games Festival, just relax in a comfortable ger camp on the shore of Lake Khovsgol with tranquility at your door; or in proper way explore the city of Irkutsk — Paris of Siberia and Its Microcosm, villages of Old Believers and their style of living, learn the cultures and way of life of indigenous people of Siberia, ethnic minorities like the Buryats, Evenks, Soyots, Nanai and Tofa.

Traveling with «Absolute Siberia» means being a part of sustainable tourism in Lake Baikal Area and that of Siberia. Trips and

adventures we offer are life and soul enriching, a life time experience and, finally, an absolute travel event, giving visitors a fresh way to explore and appreciate the area's abundant wildlife and cultures..

Many areas «Absolute Siberia» takes tourists to are quite isolated and have remained pristine; you will be able to appreciate their natural beauty and primordial ways of life of some people inhabiting our geographic destinations, classical Siberian - Russian and local cultures. Throughout our tour itineraries you will have the opportunities to witness ef-





«Absolute Siberia» Events & Expeditions Bureau



forts being made by the national parks and nature preserves for positive conservation action. Few of our trips focus on capturing the essence of Siberia in a short time, and most will not require a fairly active schedule to lead. On our tour programs on some nights, you'll stay in Burayt or Mongolian yurts, retreat lodges or share with locals their homes, on other nights you will stay in comfortable and best available hotels, and on our expeditionary journeys overnight in tents or tepees are very possible. Many of our trips may be considered as active leisure trips with few opportunities for strenuous pursuits. But no matter what kind of tour of your choice you go on with us, be it a cultural journey or a more active one – every effort will be made to make you feel comfortable and safe, provide tasty meals, friendly and warm atmosphere.

In addition, you often will have talks by and discussions with local experts and on some trips lectures by naturalists, archeologists, and national parks personnel are also included.

At all times during the trip you will be accompanied by a knowledgeable bilingual guide and tour escort. The guides we employ or hire have worked with many foreign travelers and are well acquainted with common worldwide standards. Besides that they are personable and have a good sense of humor.

Usually prices of our trips include all meals and lodging from arrival in your starting point of the trip and throughout the full run of the tour itinerary as it is correspondingly described in each case. It also includes all activities, named in our brochures, domestic flights or train fare except few optional items and services. We widely practice tier-pricing of the trips when the cost per person shall be quoted according to the number of tour participants in a group. Further, the trip price often does not include the cost of alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and items of a personal nature.

Almost any of the trips we offer except for few are customizable to meet your special requirements.

We will gladly and professionally design private itineraries that fully expose the traveler to sights and experiences not found on typical trips. We are devoted to finding around Baikal area, Siberia and beyond places where one can reconnect with nature and learn the right people.

For transportation we use modern vehicles in the more developed regions of Siberia, or best available in the areas of our tour operations. And certainly these vehicles are properly maintained, safe to drive or ride. For our circumnavigation/cruising trips we use renovated all weather ocean vessels of «Yaroslavets-boats» type. A boat like that which is most common on Lake Baikal and in Siberia, is durable and low draft, which allows it, effectively, to run aground to discharge passengers on the lake's shore. This proves essential, since for the bulk of such of our trips you'll explore vast unspoiled stretches of lake and shore – with bays, lagoons and rivers at the foot of quite high mountains, and where no piers are available.





About Our Travel Destinations



Irkutsk city – The Siberian Microcosm & Paris Of Siberia

«For the benefit of those travelers whose time and means are limited, I am convinced that there is no better way of getting an impression of Siberia, both old and new, than to go to Irkutsk and, using it as a base, take few easy side trips. Only there can the «Siberian Miracle» be seen in condensed form – not all of it, no, but enough to get a fairly good picture. To me Irkutsk is Siberia, as it was, and as it is...» (George St. George).

Pioneers, Cossacks, missionaries, political exiles, rich merchants who could compete with the spiritual flower of Russia, the nobility – each added to the glory and honor of their city – Irkutsk. Talented workers who gave such a distinctive and unique face to the capital of East Siberia have tirelessly worked for their descendants.



«All good things in Siberia come from Irkutsk. The town had blossomed, becoming not only the administrative and commercial focus of eastern Russia, but also the center from which radiated those imaginative ideas that enrich society...» (James A. Michener, «Alaska»).





About Our Travel Destinations



The mellow chime of hundreds of bells met Irkutsk's guests on Orthodox holidays at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nowadays for your first encounter with the city, we would likely take you to the first church and stone building from which the city's genealogy is counted — slim and graceful Savior Church called «The swan song of ancient Russian architecture» by specialists.

«Irkutsk, like Rome, has found a way of combining the modern with the old; it looks ahead, but it doesn't try to forget or obliterate its past. ...I honestly feel that Irkutsk is the most pleasant large city of Siberia. To me Irkutsk is an imperial city, a city steeped in tradition...» (George St. George, «Siberia. The new frontier», 1969).

Irkutsk merchants were among those who worked the hardest in making the city prosperous. They built hospitals, orphanages, colleges, libraries and churches. People used to say that

if the merchants of Irkutsk had wanted to, they could have built a glittering road of silver roubles that stretched all the 5000-km way to Moscow. The great wealth amassed by the local merchants

left the first memories of himself in far Siberia and only later gained fame in Moscow and St.Petersburg.

In summer of 2011 Irkutsk celebrated 350-th anniversary year



contributed greatly to the unique character of Irkutsk architecture, because when it came time for them to build their homes, they called on the best architects in Russia. And it sometimes happened that a talented architect

since its foundation with great restoration and recreating of its historical part. As in the past Irkutsk remains to be a hospitable city to travelers. And contemporary hospitality industry also continues to develop here.





About Our Travel Destinations



Lake Baikal: The Pearl of Siberia & Well of the Planet Earth

«Baikal is not just a lake but something greater and deeper. It is bottomless and majestic, but not an ocean or sea in which man loses all his visible bearings. There we sense the greatness of nature, feeling at one with it, not alienated from it, which is a rare phenomenon in developed countries. Baikal is a bridge to space. You must see Baikal to be able to say what it is like.» (Erdeni Ulanov, 1993).

Our planet has many lakes considered to be its splendid embellishment. Baikal lake is a unique pearl from that necklace. Holy Sea, Sacred Lake, the Blue Eye of Siberia and Spiritual Waters are names that have been given to Lake Bai-

kal by its ancient native dwellers, by Russians who came to Lake Baikal's coast in the seventeenth century, and by foreign travelers who worshipped its magnificence and mystical beauty.

«To a Siberian, the Baikal is what Mecca is to a Sudanese dervish. It is a wonder to top all wonders» (George St. George, 1969).

For the Russian people Lake Baikal is a national treasure. Located in Siberia near the Mongolian border, and surrounded by mountains, forests and wild rivers, Baikal is an immense and breathtaking area of physical beauty. Baikal holds twenty per cent of the earth's fresh water and harbors more endemic

species of plants and animals than any other lake in the world.

A glimpse into the lake's clear water is enough to convince anyone that nature not only exists in Siberia, it flourishes. The lake's surrounding wild mountains and rivers make Lake Baikal region an ideal area for engaging in an array of outdoor pursuits including hiking, climbing, whitewater sports, skiing and nature photography.

Our people live at the shores of the sacred Lake Baikal, their roots are deep and the history of the past is rich, the beautiful nature and crystal - clear waters of Baikal inspire them and give hopes for the better future...





About Our Travel Destinations

Baikal-Mongolia Asia: People, History & Culture



Today, as in the past, Baikal remains a crossroads of cultures where native Soyots still herd reindeer and Buryat people maintain many of their old traditions.

The Buryats – numbering approximately 350,000 are the largest ethnic minority group in Siberia, mainly concentrated in their homeland, the Buryat Republic, and with the majority living in and around Ulan

Ude, its capital, although many live more traditionally in the countryside. The Buryats still preserve their shamanism religion as well as many practice Buddhism. Close to Ulan Ude there's Ivolginsky Datsan located in a picturesque and peaceful place named Ivolga. Ivolginsky Datsan, considered to be the center of Buddhism in Russia, was the only Buddhist monastery tolerated by

the Communists, and has more than 1,000 Buddha statues, from small ones to the one that is 2 meters high.

The Old Believers make up a unique regional ethnographic group. They were founded more than 200 years ago by those of the authentic Orthodox faith unwilling to accept the liturgical reforms of the 17th century Russian Orthodox Church. In 1650 Old Believers broke away from the Russian Orthodox Church and then were cruelly persecuted for their actions by the church. Eventually, the Old Believers divided into sects, some sects fleeing to the borderlands, others exiled to Siberia and many resided in the remote wilds of Siberia. Scattered across they lived in isolation and preserved their beliefs, including their sacred two finger cross sign. Music is particularly important to Old Believer culture. The great Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov notes that their songs are an example of «ancient pure Russian melody.» Even today in Buryatia, Krasnoyarsk Krai and Tuva where we extend our tours the Semeiskie villages have gifted singers who follow the traditional singing styles and transfer this gift of music to their sons and daughters.

Following the Ancient Great Tea Road

For hundreds of years bales of tea were carried from China to Russia on camel backs and horse sleighs through the deserts of Central Asia and the dense forests of Siberia. This passage, known as the Tea Road, became more than just a trade route over time and facilitated the development of economic and cultural exchange between East and West. The Tea Road started in Kalgan located just behind the Great Wall. When

the tea had been concentrated and processed, it was then purchased by the Russian trading companies and sent further to Kyakhta, on the Russian Mongolian border. In Kyakhta, boxes of tea were inspected, sewed into raw bull hides called tsybics and marked. Bundles of the packed tea were then loaded on carts or sledges and sent on to Irkutsk.

In 1861, Irkutsk became a customs city, responsible for enforcing

the new taxing of tsybics. From Kyakhta to Irkutsk there were two roads; one led through the Famous Russian Khमार-Daban Mountains, the other through Selenginsk and Verkhneudinsk. Both roads led to Mysovaya Station on Lake Baikal, where cargo was delivered by ship to Port Listvyanka, from there the tea caravan continued to Europe and the Irbit Trade Fair.



Highlight Tour Product-2015

Exploring Lake Baikal: The Pearl of Siberia

Developed together with



Contact Geographic Expeditions Inc., to book this tour in the USA©, Tel.:415-922-0448, Toll Free: 888-570-7108

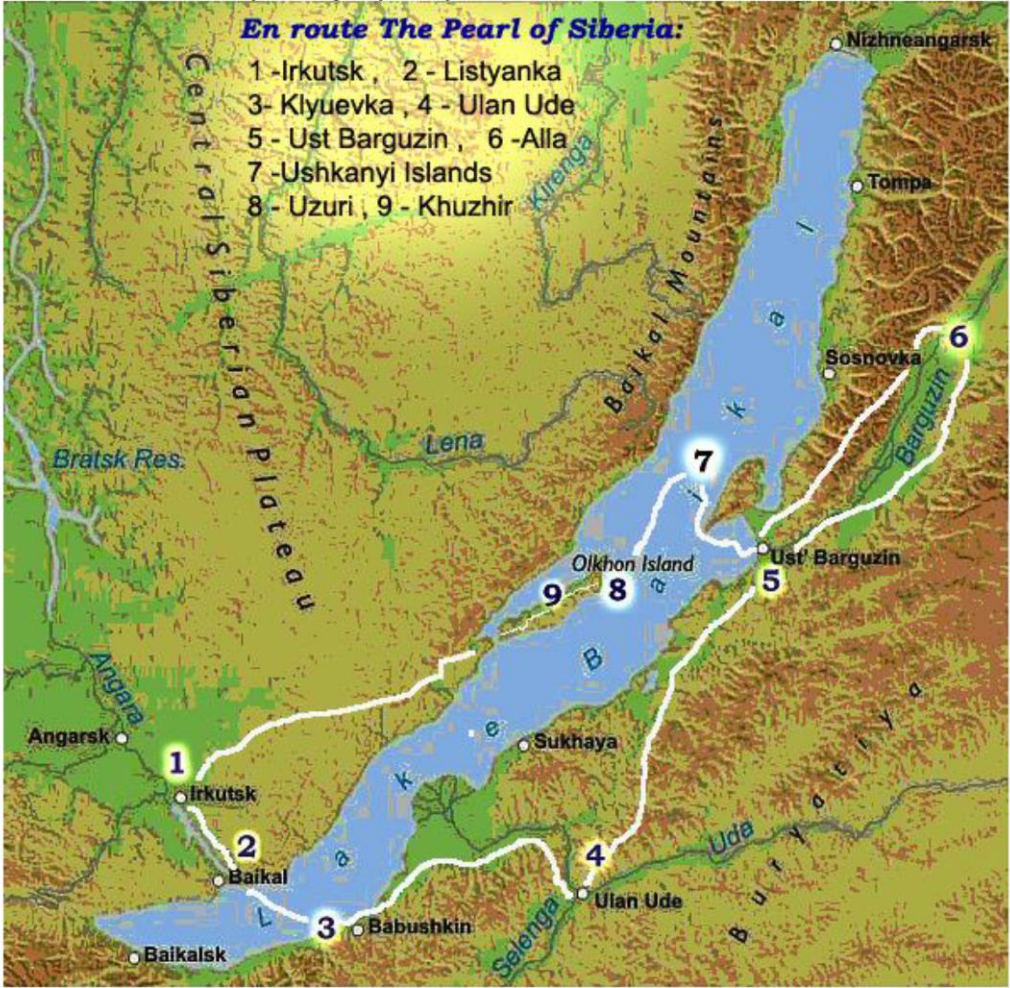
In the midst of Siberia's vast wilderness lies one of the most beautiful lakes in the world: Baikal. The word Baikal comes from the Mongolian "BAIGAL" for "nature" and it's an apt moniker. Baikal is the largest, deepest, and oldest freshwater lake on the planet, containing an astonishing 20% of the world's fresh water (more volume than all the Great Lakes combined). To better illustrate the prodigious volume of this body of water, if all of Baikal's 336 inlets were to stop flowing and its sole outlet, the Angara River, were to continue draining, it would take about four hundred years to empty Lake Baikal's basin. And all the major rivers in the world – the Amazon, Ganges, Mississippi, Nile, and Congo, together with all the other rivers and streams on earth – would have to flow an entire year or more just to refill it.

On this journey, you'll start from Irkutsk, after short introduction to this fascinating city historically known as Paris of Siberia, your first "circumnavigation" crossing of Lake Baikal from its western shore to the to eastern one will take you to Buryat Republic. Then travel through the heart of Buryatia, starting with visit to Old Believers, and then - the jaw-droopingly beautiful Barguzin Valley. Then it's on to the lovely Chivirkusky Bay and the "Holy Nose" peninsula. You'll cross Lake Baikal to Olkhon Island on a chartered boat, stopping en route at Ushkanyi Island to see the nerpa seals, the world's only freshwater seals which are only found in the waters of Lake Baikal. Olkhon Island's stunning coastline offers some of the most spectacular views of the lake. You'll explore the far north of the island before returning to Irkutsk, often described as one of the most beautiful cities in Russia, where you can join the Mongolia & Siberia group on an overland extension trip along the Great Russian Tea Road to Mongolia.

Exploring Lake Baikal: The Pearl of Siberia



14 days/13 nights journey to learn Lake Baikal nature & native cultures



The Tour Dossier



Day 1 – Start the journey introduction to “Paris of Siberia” tour with ULAN-UDE SIGHTSEEING

Our journey begins in Irkutsk, often referred to as one of the most beautiful cities in Russia. Today you arrive in Irkutsk , and after collecting your bags, proceed into the receiving area where you'll be met and transferred to a hotel in the center of town.

The afternoon is free to relax and get over jet lag, or you might enjoy a pleasant stroll along the Angara River. In the evening, we'll gather for a brief orientation meeting, followed by a festive welcome dinner.

Day 2 – In Irkutsk

We have a full day to explore Irkutsk, often referred to as one of the most beautiful cities in Russia. It was founded in 1661 when the Russian military troops established a fortress on the right bank of the Angara River. From the late 17th century, it was a political, economical, and cultural center of Siberia. The city's Russian classical architecture dates from the 1880s, after gold was discovered in the area. Most of the brick mansions and grand public buildings were constructed in the late 19th - early 20th century. The beautiful Russian Orthodox churches and a Polish Cathedral (the only Siberian Gothic-style building) are located downtown. We will see many small wooden houses that are decorated with "wooden laces" (hand-carved shutters and building trim).

This afternoon we'll visit the Natural History museum and take a pleasant stroll alongside the Angara River. Lunch shall be served in the Russian restaurant called "Rassolnik" ("Pickles soup") located in the historical 130-th quarter of Irkutsk that was recently renovated and reconstructed to reestablish the historical look of the city and convey its past atmosphere. The evening is free to relax.



Day 3 – Drive to the world’s widest river mouth on Lake Baikal

After breakfast we'll check out of the hotel and depart for Listvyanka, on the shore of Lake Baikal. En route we will visit the Taltzy open air wooden architecture museum, which offers unique displays of the original wooden households and structures.

We continue to the small village of Listvyanka with a stop at the Shaman rock. Listvyanka is located on the shores of Lake Baikal at the mouth of the Angara River (the lake's only outlet). Our drive takes us along the Irkutsk-Baikal road which was constructed almost 50 years ago in preparation for President Eisenhower's visit. The President was invited to visit the lake as it was said that his ancestors were Siberian gold merchants. After the shooting down of an American spy plane, however, the President's visit was canceled. Interesting legends concerning Lake Baikal have been passed down over the centuries. Ask your guide to recount the legend of "Father".



Lunch of tasty Baikal-Siberian cuisine featuring endemic “omul”-fish shish kebabs shall be served at the waterfront restaurant “Past Century”. After lunch we will visit and tour Baikal Ecology Museum and its aquarium, which features one-of-a-kind exhibits on the flora and fauna found only in the Lake Baikal region, as well as the newly constructed aquarium which houses live fresh water Baikal seals (known as nerpa). Before dinner we will also visit the St. Nicholas-the –Wonder-Maker functioning Orthodox Church in Listvyanka and local bazaar where one can show the fish is smoked, and shop for souvenirs, unique Siberia minerals.



Day 4 – Boat across Lake Baikal and drive to Ulan Ude

After breakfast and checking out of our hotel, we transfer to the boat station for a four hour crossing of Lake Baikal eastwards.

Lake Baikal is often called the “Blue Eye of Siberia”. It lies along a tectonic break surrounded by mountains and rocky, tree-coated cliffs. The lake is 400 miles long and between 18 and 50 miles wide, covering an area equal to Belgium and the Netherlands put together. Baikal is more than a mile deep in many places. Baikal is also the world's oldest lake. Its banks are 1600 feet above sea level and the mountains surrounding it rise to over 9000 feet. Lake Baikal's water is crystal clear - a white sheet thrown into it can be clearly seen at a depth of 120 feet. Scientists still disagree on how the omul, a white fish of the salmon family, as well as seals (all typically salt water sea life) found especially in the northern part of the lake, reached Baikal from the sea



Lunch as very special “Baikal cruise picnic” shall be served on board. Our Chef will not just provide you a homemade meal, but also show a kind of master class on board – “turning of silver into gold, that’s how one can call the process of smoking omul-fish using traditional Baikal know-how. And in general, your lunch on board today will more remind of a banquet: a number of pickles and salads, appetizers, salmon caviar served with a galls of wine or a shot of vodka as per your choice, potatoes baked in a iron pot, tea served fro the samovar... As we approach the eastern shore, we’ll enjoy panoramic views of the Khamar Daban mountains. By late afternoon we disembark at the boat station at the settlement of Kluevka, where we’ll be met by our vehicles for the approximately three-hour drive to Ulan Ude along very picturesque highway passing by several villages with a couple of stops to stretch legs and take pictures. Upon arrival in Ulan Ude we check in at the downtown hotel, then have dinner and overnight.



Day 5 – Introduction to the capital of Buryat Republic and its Native people



After breakfast we'll explore the city of Ulan Ude, including the old sections with beautifully restored wooden houses. This charming city lies at the base of green rolling hills where the Selenga and Uda rivers meet.

Ulan Ude is the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Buryatia. The Buryats, the largest ethnic minority group in Siberia, are mainly concentrated in Buryatia, the south-central region of Siberia along the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. They are descendants of Mongolia and the customs of the two peoples still remain intertwined, particularly in their nomadic herding, their homes (called "gers" in Mongolia and "yurts" in Siberia) and their belief in Buddhism and shamanism. In the 19th century the Buryats adopted Buddhism, but did not give up their beliefs in shamanism and they managed to practice the two religions side by side.

Our exploration of this interesting city begins with the 18th century Cathedral of Odigitria and the old merchant's street dotted with beautifully carved wooden houses.

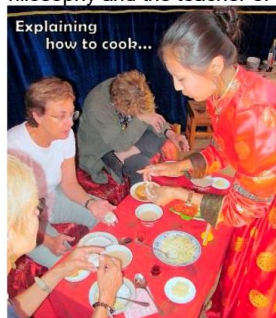
This afternoon we'll make an excursion out of Ulan Ude to the Buryat village of Arbidzhil. Here we can enjoy a visit with the villagers, who will host us for a traditional Buryat meal, for those who volunteer also offering an easy class of how to cook the "pozy – Buryat dumplings", as well as will treat us to some traditional entertainment that include national knuckle bones game and archery.

The Buryats are related by language, history, habitat, and culture to the Khalha Mongols of Mongolia and the Kalmyk (Oirat), who together form the principal Mongol peoples. The Buryats are among the smaller of these groups, numbering some 550,000 in the early 21st century. By tradition they are a nomadic pastoral people who herd cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and a few camels. In their religious life, the Buryats have an intricate combination of shamanic and Buddhist beliefs.

Not far from Arbidzhil Village is an important Buddhist monastery, Atsagat Datsan, which we can also visit. This monastery has a long and storied history. Originally founded in 1825, the temple used to accommodate a main temple, a library, a printing press and a school. In 1891 it was visited by Czar Nicholas II. At the beginning of the 20th century, a school of Tibetan medicine was founded at the datsan, and it later became quite famous. A lot of medicinal herbs were grown on the temple's plantations. The school was established by Agvan Dorzhiyev, a Doctor of Buddhist Philosophy and the teacher of the 13th Dalai Lama.



Baptizing in St. Odigitria Orthodox Church



Explaining how to cook...



Day 6 – Visit to Russia's Main Buddhist Temple and be introduced to the Old Believers



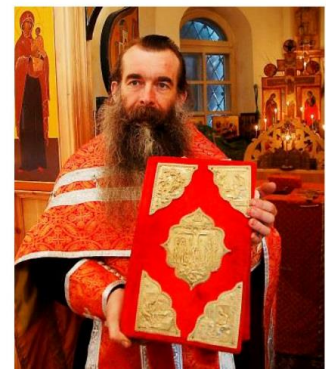
Today you'll visit the Ivolginsky Datsan (a Buddhist monastery), located in lovely Ivolga, about 15 miles from Ulan Ude. You'll enjoy a tour of the temple by a *huvanak* (a young monk studying at the temple). This is often referred to as the most important Buddhist monastery in Russia. It is also home to a phenomenon that continues to intrigue scientists and attract believers by the thousands — the preserved body of the Khambo Lama, who died in 1927 and is still sitting upright in the lotus position.

Khambo Lama at Ivolginsky Datsan

In 1927, the 75 year old Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov announced it was time for his death. Itigilov, who was the 12th Pandito Khambo Lama, the titular head of the Buddhist faith in Russia, had the other lamas join him in meditation. He died mid-meditation. His sitting body was set upright inside a wooden box and buried. Shortly thereafter Buddhism was all but wiped from newly communist Russia. Interestingly, Itigilov's testament also requested that monks exhume his body after a period of some years. This was done once in 1955 and again in 1973 (after some initial difficulty in locating the body). Both times they found that the body perfectly preserved and still sitting upright (which a dead body cannot normally do for more than a couple of weeks). The monks did not publicize the astonishing phenomenon, due to the anti-religion policies of the Communist government. The body of Dasha-Dorzho Itigilov was transferred to Ivolginsky Datsan and publicly unveiled for the first time in September 2002, 75 years after his death in 1927. His body has decayed slightly since its exhumation but still remains in a state of preservation that baffles scientists and draws believers by the thousands. In November 2004, Professor Viktor Zvyagin of the Federal Center of Forensic Medicine examined Itigilov's body in Ivolginsk and conducted analyses of hair, skin and nail specimens in Moscow. He concluded that Itigilov's body was in the condition of someone who had died 36 hours ago. "In my years of practice I have encountered quite a few instances of preserved bodies, but those were either the result of mummification or extreme environmental conditions", Zvyagin said. "But this is something different, and for me, incomprehensible. It's a phenomenon that calls for the most detailed research. Many locals also believe Itigilov's body to have healing powers, and pilgrims flock to Ivolginsky to press their foreheads to the Lama's scarf. Wheelchairs and crutches are often left near the body as a sign of healing. Itigilov's body, dressed in bright gold and orange robes, is kept in a glass case in front of the large Buddha statue on an upper floor of the main temple. It is only exhibited to the public for seven days a year, on Buddhist holidays.



In the late afternoon, you'll drive to Tarbagatay, a village of Old Believers. The Old Believers are orthodox Christians who did not accept the Russian church reform in 17th century and decided to separate from the official Orthodox church as a result. To avoid persecution, the Old Believers fled to various parts of Russia, many of them eventually settling in Siberia. They still live very much as they did centuries ago, growing their own vegetables, and hunting and fishing for food. Many families own very old church books dating from the 17th century. They live by the "Old Believers' rules" and some even turn down the state pensions they are owed. Old Believers, dressed in their bright folk costumes and wearing large amber necklaces, will meet you near the village and you will take a short hike up to the sacred Omulevaya



Mountain. On top of this mountain a group of the Old Believers from the Trabagatay village will give you a brief introduction to their culture. Then you proceed to the village Cultural Center to enjoy the great folk concert, learn about the customs of Old Believers, and perhaps take part in their "match-making and bride & groom games".

Afterwards, the female leader of the *semeiskiye* will host a gala dinner. The dinner will feature tasty home-made traditional foods of the Old Believers. Here you have an excellent opportunity to talk with and learn much from the *semeiskiye* people.

After enjoying the hospitality of the Old Believers, you'll return to Ulan Ude for the night.

Old Believers

There are currently some 200,000 Old Believers living in Siberia. Their forefathers settled here around 1765. The Old Believers are an Orthodox Christian sect who fled persecution from the doctrinal reforms of their church in the 17th century. In doing so, they avoided imprisonment, forced labor, execution and being burned alive. Some settled in the U.S., Canada, Brazil and even Australia while others, thanks to Catherine the Great and her religious tolerance reforms, settled in Siberia. Safe in their isolated communities, they've managed to preserve their culture. Typically, Old Believers built their settlements along rivers (such as the Chika River in the Buriat Republic). They designed their streets to run parallel to the river. A typical cottage consisted of three chambers: a covered shelter (sen); the main room of the cottage (izba), which contained the stove; and a separate, brighter, adjoining room with larger windows (gornitsa). Because the gornitsa was expensive to heat, nineteenth-century peasants used it only during the summer months. A wooden fence enclosed the cottage courtyard. Unlike their Russian Orthodox neighbors, who built their homes directly overlooking the street, Old Believers often hid their houses behind a fence and courtyard so as to escape "worldly blandishments."



In 1918 the Bolshevik state nationalized private industry, forced many of the Old Believer capitalists into exile, and permanently ended most of their economic influence. Some Old Believer communities, however, struggle to remain self-sufficient and produce their own clothing, houses, and books. To escape from Stalin's campaign to collectivize the countryside some Old Believers moved entire villages to remote areas in Siberia or the Altai region. Until 1950, for example, a colony of Old Believers lived almost completely isolated from the world near Iaiurevo in Siberia. Only the village headman ventured occasionally into town to trade for metal fishing and hunting gear, salt, and iron for tools. These Old Believers spun their own cloth, made their own boots and clothing, and remained secluded until 1950, when the Soviet secret police (called at that time the Ministry of Internal Affairs) discovered and arrested them for belonging to an "anti-Soviet organization." Ethnographers from the Soviet Academy of Sciences continue to discover isolated settlements of this type in Siberia and the Far North. In 2001, the Old Believers were recognized by UNESCO as one of 19 original "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."



Watch or even partake in the ancient match-making and wedding ceremony of Old Believers



Old Believer hosts shall definitely do their best to please their guests, and besides traditional hospitality and homemade main meal, salads and appetizers will lay a separate tea-table, featuring tasty pies & cookies

Day 7 – Drive to Ust-Barguzin



The drive from Ulan-Ude to Ust-Barguzin (~190 miles) takes just about five hours. The road is mostly paved, and the beautiful landscapes make the perfect introduction to Siberia’s vast wilderness. This is the renowned Siberian taiga, a boreal forest that forms the world’s largest terrestrial biome, which stretches in a vast belt all the way across Russia, from the Pacific to the Urals. This drive takes you through a landscape of rolling hills and wide valleys covered with vast tracts of forest. Spruce, larch and pines predominate, but there’s also a good mix of deciduous foliage, notably groves of birch and aspen. Passing by the village of Baturino we shall be able to see Sretenskiy nunnery dedicated to the Meeting of Our Lord Jesus Christ and founded in 1813 near Baturino village, a

beautiful church with unique Orthodox iconostasis, surrounded by fancy decorated wooden houses. In the church grounds there’s also a tomb of Ivan Shimkov, one of the Decembrists revolutionaries banned to Siberia by the Russian tsar in 1826.

After about three hours you will reach the shore of Lake Baikal. If it’s a clear day, you may be able to see Olkhon Island in the distance across the lake. The drive skirts the lakeshore heading northward, past the fast-growing community of Turka. Soon the distinctive outline of Svyatoy Nos (the “Holy Nose”) Peninsula comes into view, and your goal for the night, the village of Ust-Barguzin, hugs the shore nearby. This little town of Ust-Barguzin (pop. ~ 10,000) looks a bit ramshackle on first inspection, but it’s actually quite a friendly and charming place. Tall wooden fences line many streets, so the cute houses, yards and well-kept garden plots are often not visible from the road. The best way to experience the warmth and hospitality of this region is to stay with a local family. A number of households offer comfortable accommodations in their homes. You’ll enjoy delicious home-cooked meals, and if you’re interested in sampling one of Siberia’s most stimulating experiences, a relaxing banya (Russian sauna).



Day 9 – Explore ALLA Gorge and visit Buryat & Evenk people, meet the blacksmith shamans



This morning you'll drive about 30 miles further north to the village of Alla. This stretch of road is not paved, and is among the roughest you'll encounter on this journey, but the destination is well worth the effort.

The village of Alla is located near the entrance to the spectacular Alla Gorge, and the arjan (sacred mineral spring) near the entrance to the gorge is said to have many curative properties. They are located next to a tiny stream, just before it flows into the Alla River and plunges into a narrow, rocky cleft and out onto the wide plain of the Barguzin Valley. There are two sets of steep wooden stairs you must descend to reach the springs. The water is 42 C, and the facilities consist of a large tub inside a wooden structure. The tub inside this building is often busy with locals taking the waters,

and it only takes a few people to fill the soaking tub to capacity. There is a beautiful hike up Alla Gorge that should not be missed. It takes around one hour (each way) to reach a lovely waterfall. The trail proceeds through pine forests following the rushing Alla River. After taking a right fork in the trail, you begin to climb steadily, and you should reach the cascade about 20 minutes from the fork. It's also possible to hike further up the gorge, but the trail becomes much less distinct after about two hours of hiking. Bears inhabit this valley, especially in the higher reaches, so it's wise to be alert and make noise as you hike. After the hike, you'll return to Alla Village for a visit to the Evenk Cultural Center. There you will be given a good tour of the Center, the guide will tell you about the center's activities, show the embroidery and leather works made by kids, their drawing as well as various authentic items relating to the life of the Evenks. You'll be also able to try on the Evenki national cloths made of fur and trimmed here with beads, decorated with embroidery. We will also have our lunch meal consisting of delicious noodle soup and Evenki meat-dumplings, a salad with wild gooseberry



The Evenks have inhabited the Baikal region since the Neolithic era. Traditionally their life involved a mix of pastoralism and hunting-gathering—they relied on their domesticated reindeer for milk and transport and hunted other large game for meat. These days the Evenks are divided into two groups, which engage in different lifestyles. Those who live in the more remote reaches of the taiga still hunt for food and breed reindeer. They live in conical tents made from birch bark or reindeer skin draped over poles of birch. When they moved camp, the Evenks generally leave the dwelling's framework and carry only the more portable coverings. During winter, the hunting season, most camps consisted of one or two tents while the spring encampments might consist of up to ten households. The other type of Evenks are also pastoralists, but depend mainly on horses and cattle as well as some farming. Alla's population consists primarily of this type. The skill of riding the domesticated reindeer allowed the Evenks to colonize vast areas of the eastern taiga which had previously been impenetrable. The Evenks use a saddle unique to their culture which is placed on the shoulders of the reindeer (this lessens the strain on the animal). Also, the Evenks traditionally did not use stirrups, instead preferring to use a stick to balance. Evenks did not develop reindeer sledges until comparatively recent times. They instead used their reindeer as pack animals and often traversed great distances on foot, using snowshoes or skis. The Evenki people do not eat their domesticated reindeer (although they do hunt and eat wild reindeer) but rather keep them for milk.

Finally today, before dinner we shall be arriving at Kurukmkan town where we still have time , if anybody wants to, visit the so-called Russia's Center for Meditation located close to the hotel where we have dinner and stay for the overnight.



Day 11 – Explore HOLY NOSE Peninsula and hot mineral springs



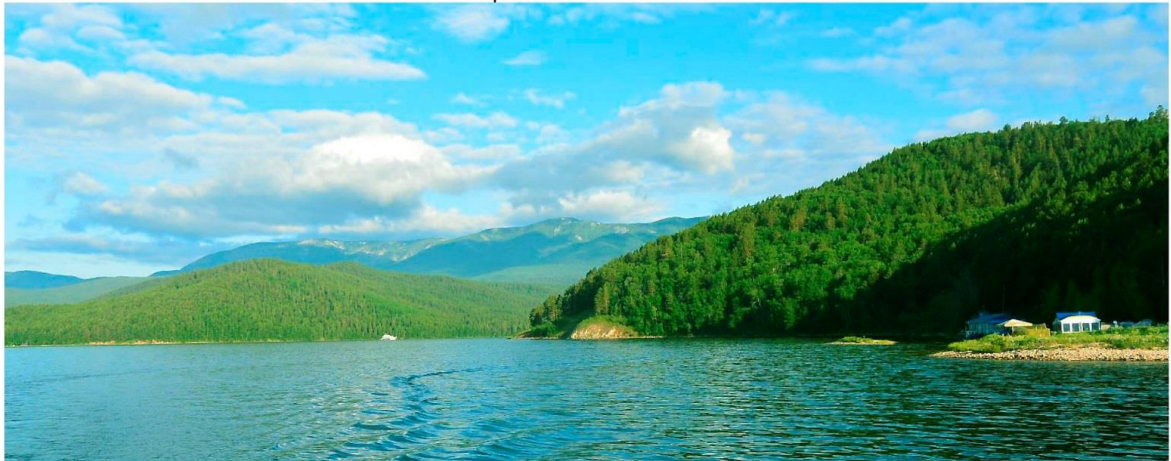
Today you'll drive a short distance to the Svyatoy Nos ("Holy Nose") Peninsula, which looms impressively over Chivyrkuyski and Zmeinaya Bays. From Ust- Barguzin, you again cross the river (by ferry), but instead of heading north to the Barguzin Valley, you take a small dirt track west following a sandy spit that skirts Barguzinsky Bay. The dirt road is pretty rough, but the rewards are worthwhile. Keep your eyes peeled for bears on this stretch of coast. After about 40 minutes (with a few stops) you arrive at the peninsula itself and head north along the coast, eventually reaching Chivirkuy Bay. At a place called Monakhova, there are a couple of piers, and your chartered boat will be waiting for you here.

There's a lovely trail along the coast that affords a wonderful opportunity to stretch your legs. The trail involves lots of up and down as you proceed from one inlet to the next, but overall it's not too difficult. For those who wish to hike, the tiny fishing village of Kurbulik is about seven miles from Monakhova. You can stop there for lunch and then hop on the boat to proceed further along the coast. If you prefer not to hike, you may board the boat at Monakhov0.



It will take about 30 minutes by boat from Kurbulik to a place called Zmeyovaya ("snake bay"). Here you'll find two hot mineral springs that offer a soothing respite for sore muscles. The one on the right as you face the beach is the hotter of the two springs (~ 54 C). The other spring, a few yards up the shore, is not as hot, and there's a lot more organic matter floating in the water. A quick dip in Lake Baikal after the springs is quite refreshing.

A bit further up the coast (~20 minutes on foot, or a few minutes by boat) brings you to your accommodations for the night, a floating hotel with a small restaurant nearby on the shores of a lovely bay. The hotel's banya is particularly nice, and is just the thing before plunging into the cold waters of Baikal. The atmosphere of this place is quite special.



Day 12 – Visit the Ushkanyi Archipelago & Cross Baikal to Olkhon Island

This morning you reboard your chartered boat at Zmeinaya Bay for an excursion to Ushkanyi Island to see the nerpa. The nerpa, or phoca sibirica (Baikal seal) is endemic to Lake Baikal, and is the only member of its genus that lives in fresh water. It's still a mystery how these creatures originally came to live in Lake Baikal.

One presumption is that once, long ago, Lake Baikal was linked to the oceans, and the seals arrived following the fjords (now river valleys) from the north. However they arrived, their population is today estimated to be over 100,000.





The Ushkanyi Islands are the most strictly protected area of the Zabaikalsky National Park, to stop there one needs special permission arranged far in advance.

In about 2 hours after starting our full day circumnavigation trip we shall be arriving to the Ushkanyi Islands. We get off to the shore and escorted by the national park ranger shall walk through the pine grove to the observation point. Hidden from the sight of Baikal seals behind the camouflage net we will have opportunities to watch the seals laying on the rookery, if there're no strong waves.



The Ushkanyi tiny archipelago is a favorite rookery for the nerpa seals. The seals are extremely shy of humans. Due to the strict protections put in place by the authority of the National Park, the steady stream of tourists to the three Ushkanyi Islands has been drastically reduced. The balloon-shaped creatures only come out of the water to sun themselves if the weather is nice. If the day happens to be overcast or rainy, you probably won't see them on the rocks, but may see their heads bobbing in the water near shore. If they are out, you can view them from behind a large camouflage net.

After visiting Ushkanyi Island, you'll re-board your chartered boat for the crossing of Lake Baikal. This is among the widest points of the lake, so the crossing will take about 5 hours. While on board, you'll enjoy a banquet of traditional Baikal delicacies, including the ubiquitous omul, a white fish from the salmon family

that is endemic to Lake Baikal, and some red caviar.

Your destination today is Uzuri cape. Set on the shores of a lovely bay on the eastern coast of Olkhon Island, this settlement was originally built as a meteorological station to monitor local weather conditions. It still serves that purpose, but the families who live here have recently constructed a lovely (but somewhat rustic) lodge. Uzuri makes a wonderful and remote place for an overnight. Just north of the settlement is a rocky outcrop that provides a wonderful view of the village and coastline. Nerpa are often seen bobbing in the water just off the cape around sunset. The ridge just south of the village also provides attractive hiking opportunities.



light-colored rocks. One particularly dramatic group of cliffs in this region is known as Tri Brata (“three brothers”). After spending a few hours exploring the northern capes, we’ll drive about one hour south to the village of Khuzhir. Your accommodations tonight are a short distance from Shaman Rock, on the outskirts of Khuzhir village.

Day 14 – See legendary sites of interest & nature landmarks in Khuzhir before return to Irkutsk

After breakfast we will still have time to explore Khuzhir - the central settlement of Olkhon.

There are many ancient myths and legends concerning Olkhon Island. The indigenous Buryats believe the island to be a spiritual place, and on the western coast, close to the village of Khuzhir, is perhaps Baikal's most famous landmark, the Mus Burkhan, or Shaman's Rock. This will be your first stop this morning before driving to Irkutsk.



From any perspective, this rocky promontory is an iconic image of Lake Baikal. In ancient times, religious sacrifices were made at Burkhan to the Lord of Olkhon, Ugute-noion, who was believed to dwell in a cave in the rock. The Lord of Olkhon was said to be the fiercest and most esteemed deity of Baikal. The Shaman Rock is generally regarded by Buddhists and shamanists alike as one of the 9 Asian sacred places called “Rock Temple” in the past. The Burkhan Cape and Shaman Rock Temple was once visited by the Dalai-Lama who had carried on special service near the Altar-of-Rock in a small cave inside the Craig that has some inscriptions in Sanskrit. By the shamanist believes the Cape is regarded to be home of the major of 13 sky deities – Khan Hate– Baabai who came to our Land as a fortune ruler.

After visiting this sacral, iconic site of the local people, taking pictures, we walk back to the Nikita’s Homestead for a check out.

From Khuzhir it’s another two hours to the Gates of Olkhon, the narrow straight that separates Olkhon Island from the mainland. It’s a 20-minute crossing by car ferry, and once you reach the mainland, it’s another four hours or so to Irkutsk where this great journey will terminate with a Farewell Party and overnight before you take flight back home.

We wish you an enjoyable flight back home, and believe you keep nice, pleasant and interesting Memories of your journey “Explore Lake Baikal: The Pearl of Siberia!”



The cost of the above 14-days tour package on all inclusive basis (twin room sharing at hotels Courtyard by Marriott (Irkutsk), Baikal Terema (Listvyanka), Gesser (Ulan-Ude), Beketov Family lodge (Ust Barguzin), new kurumkan hotel (Kurumkan), Floating Hotel (Chivirkuisky bay), Guest lodge at meteo station (Uzuri), Nikita Homestead (Khuzhir, Olkhon)) shall be if:

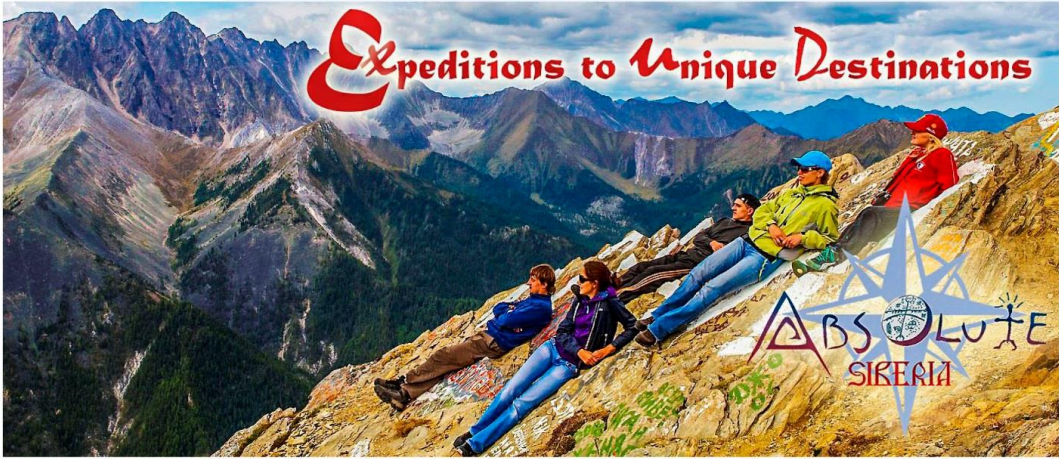
2 pax in a group - USD 9 100 p/person; 3 pax in a group - USD 6 720 p/person; 4 pax in a group - USD 6 040 p/person; 5 pax in a group - USD 5 560 p/person; 6 pax in a group - USD 5 280 p/person; 7 pax in a group - USD 4 870 p/person; 8 pax + 1 FOC in a group - USD 4 750 p/person; 9-10 pax + 1 FOC in a group - USD 4 520 p/person.

NOTE: The program of the above great journey can be customizable and shortened to meet your specific needs.

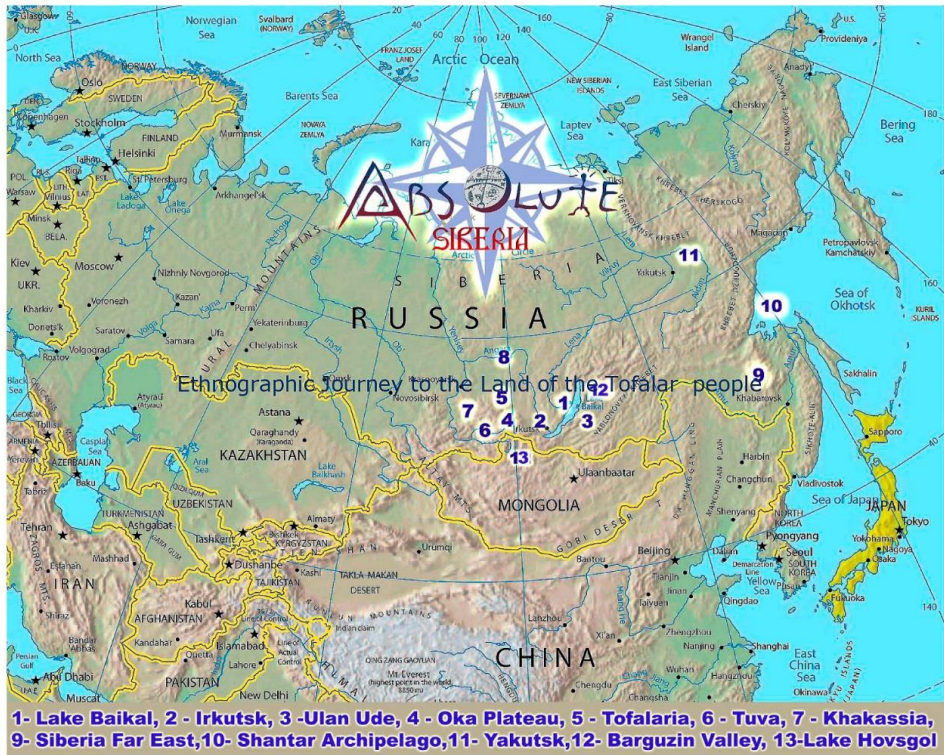


Cultural & Ethnographical Tour

Great Reindeer People of the Sayan Mountains



Ethnographic Journey to the Land of the Tofalar people



Tofalaria (#5 above), home to the TOFA or TOFALAR people, is East Siberia's most isolated territory, where no any road extends into, one of the last patches of untouched taiga the area of gorgeous rivers and waterfalls, mysterious caves and unearthly Kastarma pebble stones, the world's best sables, the Land referred to by Valentin Rasputin as the "Country next to Heaven", home to and last shelter of Siberia's smallest ethnic group - Land of the Ancient & First Nomadic Reindeer Herders of Asia called "The Tofalar" (ancient name - Karagas people)...