Welcome to Zabaikalsky National Park

Imagine a trek through thick, pristine Siberian forest, with pag- pages over snow-capped peaks, through vibrant meadows and across vast marshlands, ending at the deepest and saltiest freshwater lake in the world, the majestic Baikal. A multi-functional conservation area lying on the northeastern shoreline of Baikal, the Zabaikalsky National Park (ZNP) seeks to preserve the unique and abundant flora and fauna of Siberia while allowing visitors a rare encounter with the region’s biodiversity. Included in UNESCO’s Lake Baikal World Heritage Site, the 860,000 acre park is a true virgin wilderness of high mountain ranges, glacier-fed valleys, rock-cut gorges, lakes and stream mouths.

Three main trails span the park’s main features, from the distinctive Soumy Nos peninsula ( Holy Nose) to the breathtaking western slope of the southern Barguzin mountain range, from the lovely Chivyrkuy and seal-populated Ushkany Islands to the nearby Chivyrkuy Islands and the rich aquatic ecosystem of Chivyrkuy and Barguzin pools. Called the “Chivyrkuy kingdom” or the “path in the crowns of Baikal” by some, this landscape boasts an outstanding biodiversity.

Landscape and Flora

The national park occupies 167 square miles (260 square kilometers) on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal in the Barguzinsky district in the central republic of Buryatia. Most of the park is mountainous landscape, made up of four mountain ranges separated by lower valleys. The park’s terrain varies among steep, wetland, rocky shorelines, the sandy beaches of the park’s bays and the shores of the Chivyrkuy and Ushkany Islands.

Lake Baikal, the legendary ancient “blue eye of Siberia,” is the world’s oldest and, by volume, largest freshwater basin. Its basin measures some 360 miles by 36 miles (578 km by 57 km), and its depth is some 5,330 feet deep (1,637 meters). The lake is 250 times larger than all other Siberian lakes combined. The lake contains 20 percent of the earth’s freshwater, Baikal has long been revered as sacred by Siberian explorers in the 17th century. Settlers borrowed the Buryat word “Baigal,” meaning sea, to name the lake. The lake is 50 miles wider than Lake Michigan and twice as deep, with an average depth of 4,000 feet (1,219 meters) and a maximum depth of over 5,300 feet (1,617 meters). The lake is cleanest and, by volume, the largest freshwater lake in the world. Revered as holy “Siberia,” is the world’s oldest and, by volume, largest freshwater lake.

Primitively grazes with traces of limestones, the area surrounding the lake is of significantly ancient origin. Some 25-30 million years ago, a cataclysmic event cut deep furrows that came to form the world’s deepest continental divide and the basin of the deepest lake. Containing 20 percent of the earth’s freshwater, Baikal has long been revered as sacred by the native populations of Evorel, Olon But, and others, who derived here before the arrival of Russian explorers in the 17th century. Settlers borrowed the Buryat word “Baigal,” meaning to, or the mysterious, ancient.

From the steps to the alpine tundras to meadows, from the coastal seagrass to the dense forest and the great lakes of North America and Europe, are covered as holy by native Buryats, Baikal is also considered the cleanest and clearest large lake in the world, thanks to the filtering activity of the lake’s sponges and plankton, its enormous size, and its deep seismic vents, which provide constant oxygenation. Altogether, the lake supports 2,500 species of flora and fauna, 88 percent of which are endemic to the area. While most of the lake’s surface freezes for four months out of the year, in the summer, water temperature in the lake can reach as high as 15 to 24 degrees Celsius (59 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit). Though fed by over 300 rivers and streams, Baikal only has one outgoing river, the Angara, which flows north toward the city of Irkutsk. While the lake is remarkably pure, local and global environmental have raised concerns about timber cutting and industrial pollution from nearby cities, especially the large pulp and paper industries. UNESCO’s 1996 declaration of Baikal as a World Natural Heritage Site caused the Russian government to write an historic law that helped to protect the lake and its biodiversity remains, and it deserves our continued care.

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Coastal areas, such as the Chivyrkuy Islands and bays, are covered by a mixture of mire and wetland, Managing prairie, sand dunes and wetland. Unique plant communities of Centropus, pine, dwarf birch and shrubs flourish here along with various steppe vegetation, including aspargus, valerian and farther. What is the famous Russian sable (Martes zibellina) for Lake Baikal? The Baikal’s clear, cold water—its clarity is so great that it is said to be able to see seven thousand feet (3.5 sq. mi) of the total surface of the Ushkany Islands, there are some sea to seven thousand rivers. Some of them are rivers of a large and span three meters in diameter (9.8 ft).
Visiting the Park

All visitors to the park must register; those travelling to protected areas, such as the Ushkany Islands, must get special permission. Visitors can arrange transportation to any of the trails from the park entrance in the charming, quiet town of Ust-Barguzin.

To reach Ust-Barguzin from Ulan Ude: take the regular bus to Ust-Barguzin from the bus station (avtosostan) tel. (3012) 21-71-85. Or take a group taxi. At the city center of Ulan Ude you can hire a driver who will take you to Ust-Barguzin or Seychinsky. This trip of 170 kilometers will cost about 300 rubles and take roughly four to six hours.

Tours of the park’s trails are highly recommended and can be arranged through the following Ulan-Ude based organizations:

- Laboratory for Active Tourism
  www.lan.ru, tel. +7 (3012) 35-31-17 or 21-80-31
- Firn Travel
  www.firntravel.com, tel. +7 (3012) 21-62-50

Home stays in Ust-Barguzin can be arranged through the above organizations or through the park directly.

The Trails of Zabaikalsky National Park

The Path to a Clean Baikal: The longest trail in the park traverses a wide range of terrain and takes you on an adventure track to the lake. Beginning outside the park at the Gorny rock, it crosses the Barguzin mountain range, traces the Bolshoy Chikoy river through taiga and tundra before dividing into southern and northern trails that lead to the Chivyrkuiy Bay of Lake Baikal. From there, you can choose to pick up the trail across the bay to Seychinsky, where you can then take further and inhabit in spectacular views and lead through the natural hot springs, or return to Ust-

Monakhovskoe—Sleno Springs (Zmeynaya): Starting at the Kur basin settlement, the trail follows the Seychinsky peninsula shoreline and makes its way towards the headwater of the Han down to the Chivyrkuiy Bay. Much of the trail winds through taiga, taking views of the beautiful bays and Chivyrkuiy Peninsula. Further along the coast, Cape Onkogonskaya offers a scenic resting place, with a rocky shoreline and flowering meadows. From Terkay Bay, the end of the trail, the islands of Liubnin and Gory are visible.

Glinka—Observation Point: Starting near the south eastern road of the Belyukovsky take just outside of the park entrance, the trail crosses through the taiga, before the Chivyrkuiy peninsula points to Glinka, the 17th century burial ground of an Evenk settlement, the trail follows a rocky shoreline offering a panoramic view of the park. Similar to Chivyrkuiy, the isolation, the Aragatsut and Chivyrkuiy bays, the peaks of the Barguzin mountain range, and in fine weather the Olkhon Island can be seen.

General Park Information

The park is open from July-September.

Climate: Temperatures reach as high as a 12ºC to 4ºC in July and drops to -19ºC in January. In the mountains, the average temperatures are lower. In summer, Chikoy lake itself becomes exceedingly humid.

Cost: There is a small fee (approx. USD$ 1 to 2) to enter the park. ZNP appreciates additional contributions which all go toward upkeep of the park.

Hot Spots

- The Ushkany Islands: Consist of one large (Baklaniy) and three small islands (Dolgy, Krygly and Foskoi), they are the playground of Baikal’s sea poppy, home to the park’s ranger and meteorologist. Remnants of ancient volcanoes can be seen on Bolshoy, along with two human caves from the neolithic age (6000-6000 years ago), while Baklaniy’s largest rock is on the southern shore of Torkaya Island. To visit the islands, visitors must have writing park permission and be accompanied by a ranger. Contact the ZNP office in Ust-Barguzin.

- Thermal springs: The Zmeinyaya, Nechaevsky, and Kulinoye hot springs are located near water. Remember that it is absolutely necessary and do not create new fire pits, even to take back home for the sake of a photograph.

- Never disturb or frighten an animal for the sake of a photograph.
- Take all trash with you, and help us clean up any trash you find on the trail.
- Bring insect repellent and sun protection, please visit LAT at www.lat.iatp.org.

- Laboratory for Active Tourism, seeks to promote active tourism and outdoor activities. Volunteers can also contact the Great Baikal Trail Association by visiting www.baikal-trail.org.

Zabaikalsky Hiking Do’s ...

- Be mindful of the pristine environment. Do not remove plants, rocks, or other natural materials.
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- Take all trash with you, and help us clean up any trash you find on the trail.
- Bring insect repellent and sun protection, please visit LAT at www.lat.iatp.org.
- Do not cut down new trees unless it is absolutely necessary and do not create new fire pits even to take them back home for the sake of a photograph.

- Take the phone with you.
- Use the established paths. After all, each new trail damages the soil covering, which is not regrowthable. No entry to the Ushkany Islands; no entry to the park. Remember that if you enter and then leave the park, you have to pay 300 rubles for each person.

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