For further information about visitor rules, fees, and park services, contact the park at:
Zabaikalsky National Park
Bolninchnii per 11
Ust-Barguzin, Republic of Buryatia, 671623
Phone/Fax: + 7 (30131) 91575.
E-mail: zabaikal@burnet.ru
Web: http://ngo.burnet.ru/znp/

For more information about hiking or volunteering along the trail "Path to a Clean Baikal" contact the Laboratory for Active Tourism (LAT) at Ecological Alliance "LAT".
ul. Kommunisticheskaya 16
Ulan-Ude, Republic of Buryatiya, 670000
Phone: +7 (3012) 25-32-37 or 21-80-31
E-mail: zim73@mail.ru
Web: http://lat.iatp.ru

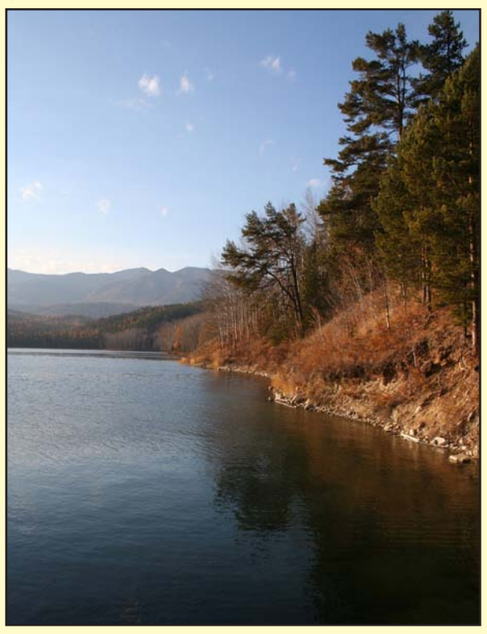
Zabaikalsky National Park

featuring the "Path to a Clean Baikal" on the Great Baikal Trail

Welcome to Zabaikalsky National Park

Imagine a trek through thick, pristine Siberian forest, with passages over snow-capped peaks, through vibrant meadows and across vast marshes, ending at the deepest and oldest 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 breathtaking nature. Included in UNESCO's Lake Baikal World Heritage Site, the 868,000 acre park is a true virgin wilderness of high mountain ranges, glacier-formed valleys, rock-rimmed bays, lonely islands and vast marshes.

Three main trails span the park's main features, from the distinctive Svaytnoy Nos peninsula (Holy Nose) to the breathtaking western slopes of the southern Barguzin mountain range, from the lonely Chiviyrkuysky and seal-populated Ushkany Islands to the marshy Chiviyrkuysky isthmus and the rich aquatic ecosystem of Chiviyrkuysky and Barguzin gulfs. Called the "Chiviyrkuysky kingdom" or the "pearl in the crown of Baikal" by some, this landscape boasts an outstanding biodiversity.



Primarily granite with traces of limestone, the area surrounding the lake is of significantly ancient origin. Some 25-30 million years ago, a cataclysmic event produced rifts 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 Evenks, Old Believers, and Buryats, who thrived here before the arrival of Russian explorers in the 17th century. Settlers borrowed the Buryat word "Baigal," meaning sea, to name the mysterious, ancient crater.

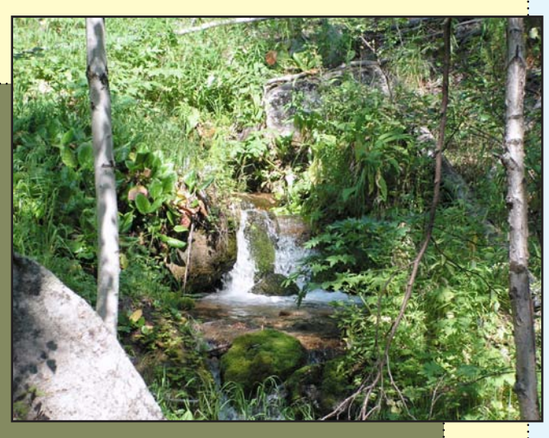
From the steppe to the alpine tundra to meadows, from the coastal swamps to the dense forest (*taiga*) the park is home to wildlife such as the brown bear, musk deer and sable, and flora such as sedge grass, rhododendron, and Siberian pine. A peek into the crystal-clear water of the lake and the rivers that flow through the park reveals a rich aquatic life, including species of bullhead, sturgeon and omul. The endemic Baikal seal (*nerpa*) is the lake's only mammal and the world's only freshwater seal.

The area within Zaibaikalsky National Park is mostly mountainous landscape, defined especially by the mountains of the Svyatoy Nos (1,877 m/6,158 ft) and Barguzin (2,376 m/7,795 ft) ranges, which traverse the park from northeast to southwest. The arching Chiviyrkuysky Isthmus, formed by sediments of the Barguzin and Lesser Chiviyrkuysky rivers, connects the Svyatoy Nos Peninsula with the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The Greater and Lesser Ushkany Islands are the tops of the underwater Akademichesky Range, which divides the lake into northern and southern basins.

Alongside modest eco-tourism, the park places a strong focus on ecological research and education. The park runs the Podlemorye Ecological Center in the town of Ust-Barguzin, and organizes ecological camps for children, as well as other programs and conferences on building environmental awareness.

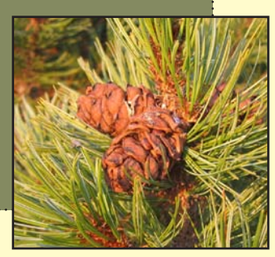
Landscape and Flora

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 mid-level and high mountain ridges. At lower altitudes, the park's terrain varies among steppe, wetlands, rocky shorelines, the sandy beaches of the park's bays and the shores of the Chiviyrkuysky and Ushkany Islands.



Taiga covers two-thirds of the park area, from 400 to 1200 meters above sea level. A wide variety of plant communities result from the rich nutrient substances found in its marshes. A third of these are made up of Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). Mountain pine (*Pinus pumila*), which also comprises a third of the taiga, primarily occurs along the eastern shore of the lake in the understory. Siberian pine (*Pinus sibirica*), larch (*Larix gmelinii*), and Siberian fir (*Abies sibirica*) make up the rest of the coniferous forests. Firs generally are found near the more humid coastal area and in the northern part of the Svaytnoy Nos Peninsula. Deciduous forests occupy a much smaller area (less than 10 percent of the park) and consist primarily of birch (*Betula ermanii, B. platyphylla*) aspen (*Populus tremula*) and willows, which thrive at the bottom of large valleys. Old growth forests of Scotch and Siberian pine, fir, and larch occupy nearly four percent of the park. Rhodedendrum is widely spread throughout the taiga floors and is known for its medicinal qualities.

Vibrant flora flourishes along Baikal's rivers



Siberian pine cones (*shishki*)

Lake Baikal, the legendary crescent "blue eye of Siberia," is the world's oldest and, by volume, largest freshwater body—its basin containing as much water as the five Great Lakes of North America combined. Revered 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 volume, and its deep seismic vents, which provide constant oxygenation. Altogether, the lake supports 2500 species of flora and fauna, 85% of which are endemic to the area. While most of the lake surface freezes for four months out of the year, in the summer, water temperature in the bays can reach as high as 15 to 24 degrees celcius (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 environmentalists have raised concerns about timber cutting and industrial pollution from nearby cities, especially the large paper pulp factory at Baikalsk. UNESCO's 1996 declaration of Baikal as a World Natural Heritage Site compelled the Russian government to write an historic law that helped to clarify protected zones, regulate the use of natural resources and identify crucial dangers. Yet many threats to the lake and its biodiversity remain, and it deserves our continued care.

Birch shrubs in the tundra

Alpine tundra, the colder, treeless area that extends from taiga to the tops of mountains, transitions from a low-altitude terrain spotted with shrubs, especially the short *Pinus pumula*, to a colder variation. Here, above 4,200 feet (1,400 m), only a few species of willow and lichen-dwarf birch can grow. Richer areas, along with rock and snow avalanche traces, are covered by bright, high-mountain meadows.

Mountain ash

Coastal areas, such as the Chiviyrkuysky isthmus and bay, are covered by a mixture of moho-sedge marsh, bentgrass prairie, sand dunes and steppe. Unique plant communities of Cembra pine, desert cedar, dwarf birch and shrubs flourish here along with various steppe vegetation, including astragalus, valerian and thyme and the endemic Popova poppy. Aside from the panoramic views from its plateaus, Holy Nose Peninsula also attracts visitors to the hot springs, located on its eastern shore.

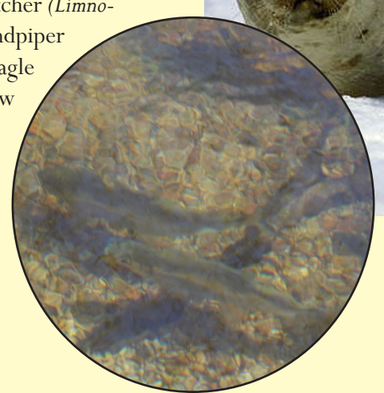
Wildlife

To many, taiga and Siberia are synonymous with an animal paradise, and the park is certainly no exception. The famous Russian sable (*Martes zibellina*) can be found in the darker forests of the park and a unique species of reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) inhabits the highest parts of the Barguzin range along with the large marmot (*Marmota camschatica*). Healthy populations of brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), red squirrels, foxes and wolves inhabit all parts of the park.

Omul (*Coregonus omul lepech.*), a fish unique to Baikal and popular among locals, is abundant in rivers, streams and lakes, while river otters (*Lutra lutra*) are common in large creeks and along the Lake Baikal shoreline. While the crayfish, a distant relative of the oceanic lobster, crab and shrimp, is only 1.5 mm long, in under one square meter of the lake's surface scientists have counted up to three million of these creatures. These tiny crayfish, the Baikal epishura, could be considered the "caretakers" of the lake; over the span of a year, this armada of insatiable crayfish is capable of sweeping clean the top 50 meters of the water three times. The gammarid shrimp, another type of crayfish twenty times the size of epishura, destroys practically everything that threatens to pollute the water including dead fish, drowned insects and animals.

Among the lake's stranger residents are the small, transparent golomyanka, or naked fish, and its cousin, the gobi, who inhabit the lake's deeper, cold temperate zone. Since more than half of the golomyanka consists of fat, the fish easily drifts through the icy water. Twenty-seven species of gobi are unique to the lake and found nowhere else on Earth. Meanwhile, the shores of the Ushkany Islands provide the breeding and playgrounds for hundreds of Baikal nerpa, the lake's sole mammal and the only freshwater seal in the world. A relic species of snake (*Natrix natrix*) lives near the Svyatoy Nos Peninsula's thermal springs, giving it its name, Zmeynaya (snake) springs. Nearby Lake Arangatui contains an abundance of dace, ide, sazan, pike, and grayling.

A visit to the large wetland on the Chiviyrkuysky isthmus offers visitors a unique opportunity to see a number of rare birds. 241 species have been found throughout the park, and thirty of these are included among the rare animals listed in the *Red Book of Buryatia*. Among the most important findings are the Asiatic Dowitcher (*Limnodrommus semipalmatus*), Greyrumped Sandpiper (*Heteroscelus brevipes*), Pallas's Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucorhpus*), Australian Curlew (*Numenius madagascarensis*), peregrine and osprey. On nine square kilometers (3.5 sq. mi) of the total surface of the Ushkany islands, there are some six to seven thousand anthills. Some of them reach human height and span three meters in diameter (9.8 ft).

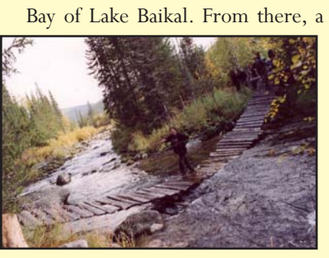


Nerpa lounging on the Ushkany Islands. Left: Omul in the Bolshoi Chiviyrkuysky river. Far left: sign of the bear.

The Trails of Zabaikalsky National Park

The Path to a Clean Baikal: The longest trail in the park traverses a wide range of terrain as it guides you on an adventurous trek to the lake. Beginning outside the park at the Gremachy river, it crosses the Barguzinsky mountain range, traces the Bolshoy Chivirkuy river through taiga and tundra before dividing into southern and northern trails that lead to the Chiviyrkuysky Bay of Lake Baikal. From there, a pre-arranged ferry can take you across the bay to Svyatoy Nos, where you can trek further and indulge in spectacular views and healing from the natural hot springs, or return to Ust-Barguzin.

Length: 54 km (33.5 mi)
Duration: 3-5 days
Terrain: taiga, tundra, mountainous, and coastal areas



Monakhova—Snake Springs (Zmeynaya): Starting at the Kurbulik settlement, the trail follows the Svyatoy Nos peninsula shoreline along Chiviyrkuysky Bay. Much of the trail winds through taiga, with views of the beautiful bays of Krestovaya and Zmeynaya, where visitors can enjoy fishing, swimming and thermal springs. Water snakes once congregated at Zmeynaya en masse, giving the bay its name. Further along the coast, Cape Onkogonskaya offers a scenic resting place with a rocky shoreline and flowering meadows. From Fertik Bay, the end of the trail, the islands of Lokhnaty and Goly are visible.

Length: 20 km (12.4 mi)
Duration: 1 day
Terrain: taiga, coastal areas.

Glinka—Observation Point: Starting near the medicinal mud of the Bormashovy Lakes just outside of Ust-Barguzin, the hike takes visitors along the Chiviyrkuysky peninsula to Glinka, the 17th century burial ground of an Evenk settlement. From here, tree-laden valleys, rocky slopes and streams greet hikers before they make the final ascent to the Svaytnoy Nos plateau. The blissful summit offers a gorgeous panorama of the park, including the Chiviyrkuysky isthmus, the Aranguatui lake, the Barguzinsky and Chiviyrkuysky bays, the peaks of the Barguzinsky range, and in fine weather, Olkhon Island.

From Ust-Barguzin
Length: 25 km (16 mi)
Duration: 4-5 days
From Glinka
Length: 10 km (6 mi)
Duration: 4-6 hours
Terrain: taiga, tundra, mountainous, and coastal areas

General Park Information

The park is open from July-September.

Climate: Temperatures reach as high as 12° to 14° celcius in July and drop to -19° celcius in January. In the mountains, the average temperatures are lower. In summer, Chiviyrkuysky isthmus can become excessively humid.

Cost: There is a small fee (appox. USD1 to 2) to enter the park. ZNP appreciates additional contributions which all go toward upkeep of the park.

Building a Path to a Clean Baikal

"The Path to a Clean Baikal" was inspired by the fisherman and hunters from the village of Barguzin who once hiked to Baikal through the Barguzinsky mountain range. In 1996 a collaboration was formed between the national park and the youth environmental group the Laboratory for Active Tourism (LAT), and they pledged to build a trail together.

Aside from its outdoor education and orienteering programs, LAT's largest project is the volunteer-based construction of "The Path to a Clean Baikal," a piece of the Great Baikal Trail. Each summer, groups of young volunteers work to clear the path of debris, create new informational signs, and pick up the garbage left by other hikers.

As the name of the trail signifies, LAT, alongside the Great Baikal Trail Association, seeks to promote ecological values as it works to maintain and improve the trail for responsible tourists.

For detailed information about the trail, tours, volunteer projects and outdoor activities, please visit LAT at www.lat.iatp.ru. Volunteers can also contact the Great Baikal Trail Association by visiting www.baikal.eastsib.ru.

Visiting the Park

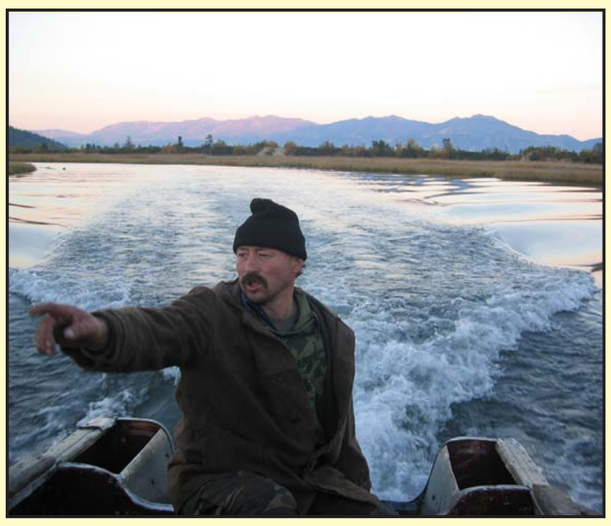
All visitors to the park must register; those travelling to protected areas, such as the Ushkany Islands, must get special permission. Visitors can arrange transportation to any of the trails from the park entrance in the charming, quiet town of Ust-Barguzin.

To reach Ust-Barguzin from Ulan Ude: take the regular bus to Ust-Barguzin from the bus station (*autovokzal*): tel (3012) 21-21-85. 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 Svaytnoy Nos. The trip of 270 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.lat.iatp.ru, tel: +7 (3012) 25-32-37 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.



Zaibaikalsky Hiking Do's ...

- Be mindful of the pristine environment: do not remove plants, rocks, or other natural mementos.
- Never disturb or frighten an animal for the sake of a photograph.
- Take all garbage with you, and help us clean up any trash you find on the trail.
- Bring neccessities and food that can easily be repackaged, reuse containers, plates and utensils and bring only biodegradable soap, when possible.
- Practice hygiene away from the campsite.
- Use the established trails. After all, each new trail damages the soil covering, which in the severe Zabaikalsky climate recovers very slowly.
- Clear fallen branches from the trail.
- Wear waterproof boots, gloves, down sleeping bags, and insect repellent. Visitors should also beware of ticks.

and Don'ts

- Never use soap in or near a river, lake or stream; never urinate or defecate within 70 meters of a river, lake or stream; bury toilet paper and cover what you leave with dirt.
-Do not camp in new sites unless it is absolutely necessary and do not create new fire pits (they take more than ten years to grow over). Please, always put out campfires completely; all the fire pits are located near water. Remember that it is easier to avoid a forest fire than to put one out.

Hot Spots

- **The Ushkany Islands**: Comprised of one large (Bolshoi) and three small islands (Dolgy, Krugly and Tonky), the Ushkany are the playground of Baikal's nerpa population, and home to the park's ranger and meteorologists. Remnants of ancient volcanoes can be seen on Bolshoi, along with two human caves from the neo-stone age (4000-5000 years ago), while Baikal's largest seal rookery is on the northern shore of Tonky island. To visit the islands, visitors must have written park permission and be accompanied by a ranger. Contact the ZNP office in Ust-Barguzin.
- **Thermal springs:** The Zmeinaya, Nechaevsky, and Kulinoye hot springs can be found along the eastern shores of Svaytnoy Nos Peninsula. Zmeinyaya is the hottest spring, with temperatures rising to 43° C.
- **Svaytnoy Nos:** An island before sediments formed the Chiviyrkuysky isthmus, the "Holy Nose" is home to rich larch and pine forests, diverse flora and fauna, and some of the tallest peaks in the park. Earning its name from a Russian Orthodox church that has since disappeared, its sacredness continues to beckon adventurous visitors.
- **Chiviyrkuysky Bay,** situated on the northern part of Svyatoy Nos peninsula amidst navy mountain ridges and thick forest, is one of the lake's most picturesque bays. With its relatively shallow and warm waters, the bay is a kayaking paradise from June until late September, and a great place to spot the lake's perch, trout and omul.

Park Points of Interest

1. Chermshanskaya grove
2. Small Chermshanskaya cave
3. Big Kaltigey Island
4. Ongokonsciy Cape
5. Thermal "Snake Springs" (Zmeinaya)
6. Small Kaltigey Island
7. Baklaniy Island
8. "Kuliniy Swamp" Natural Springs
9. "Singing beach" at Markovo
10. Lower point "Singing beach"
11. Uskhany Islands archipelago

Ecotrail "Path to a Clean Baikal"
Total length of the trail: 54 km.
Equipped Campsites: 7

Campsites:
1. Zimov'e
2. Plato
3. Taezhnyi Velikan
4. Pereprava
5. Dubari
6. Khozyain
7. Poimeniye Luga

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Brochure written and designed by Alex Pasternack, Melissa Prager and John Walkoe