

## Cultures & Eco-trails around Lake Baikal



June-September  
Irkutsk-Ulan Ude  
Minimum 10-Maximum 16  
9 days, 8 nights  
\$1,650 p.p based on double occupancy  
No domestic or international airfare included  
Escorted by local tour manager

This trip is offered to those travelers who do not mind roughing it a bit, and includes activities which are difficult to arrange individually.

**Highlights:** If there is anything that is well known about Siberia it is Lake Baikal, located in both Buryatia and the Irkutsk region. It is 636 km long and an average of 48 km wide and it holds a fifth of the fresh water reserves in the world. For the past twenty years, Lake Baikal has been studied by various conservation organizations who have given it the status of a World Heritage site. Both worldwide and local conservation organizations are very active to protect the lake against pollution, which is very difficult in Russia.

The lake's territory includes two different regions both of them equally interesting. Irkutsk has long been a fascinating city both because of its political history as well as for its magnificent wooden architecture. Buryatia is a region mostly inhabited by the Buryats, a culture that has had significant input in the fields of culture and art. It also is famous for its various ties to Buddhism. Interspersed between the two is the region where the Old Believers reside, who settled her centuries ago.

Various nature preserves and reserves surround the lake, famous for either their natural environment or as the cultural center of some of the indigenous people, such as the Even. In the last decade efforts have been undertaken to open these preserves by linking them with the Baikal trail. Our trip will use some of the trail for its activities

The only way to experience Russia is to participate in a broad spectrum of activities and most of all connect to its people. It is within these types of impressions that one will find the essence of the Russian soul and perhaps build an understanding of the difference and similarities that bind us together

**Logistical details:** While we certainly can provide details about transportation to Irkutsk, and back from Ulan Ude, this trip will commence in Irkutsk and ends in Ulan Ude. We will stay in simple hotels or lodges and also include some home stays. Hiking will not be strenuous just requires that you have some stamina. Most transportation will be by bus or by local boats. Meals will also be simple and include local specialties

## Itinerary

### Day 1, Saturday

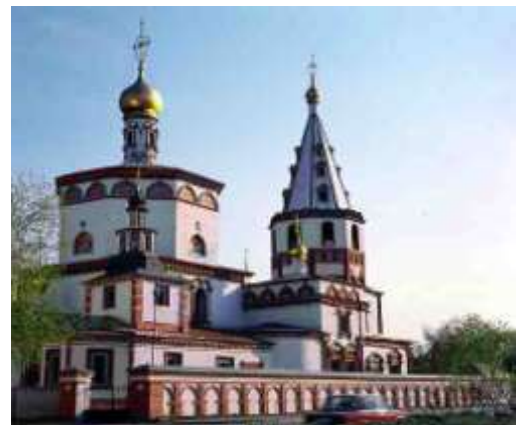
#### Irkutsk

Welcome to Irkutsk the “Paris of Siberia”, capital of Russia’s eastern part commonly called Siberia, a microcosm and gate way to Siberia’s Pearl, the wondrous Lake Baikal!

Upon arrival you will be met by our professional bi-lingual guide, who will assist you in collecting the luggage and a transfer to your hotel.

After you check into your hotel and enjoy some free leisure time, you’ll participate in a guided sightseeing tour of Irkutsk. During the tour you’ll visit the city’s historical center and its most picturesque sights, including the Znamenskaya Orthodox Cathedral, noted for its original iconostasis. You will also visit the grave of the so-called “Russian Columbus” Grigory Shelekhov who was an early Russian explorer of Alaska and graves of the Decembrists-revolutionaries banned to Siberia after an ill-fated attempt in 1825 to overthrow the Russian tsar. After exploring the city we shall have lunch in a downtown restaurant. The rest of the day is yours to explore the city on your own with your local guide’s assistance.

L, D hotel to be assigned



### Day 2, Sunday

#### Bolshoye Goloustnoye

After breakfast we check out of the hotel and transfer by coach to the Bolshoye Goloustnoye village, approximately a 110 km, 2 hours 30 minutes drive, with stops en route to see the Buryat log-yurts near the Shantuysky bridge named after the old shaman who was buried here. The surrounding area is considered the most ecologically pure area along Lake Baikal. One of the famous experts in Irkutsk on medicinal herbs and plants has made there his base camp.

Upon arrival in the village of Bolshoye Goloustnoye, you will be sharing accommodations with local families with sanitary facilities outside. You will have lunch with your families. After lunch you’ll proceed on a guided walk to the Goloustnyaya river delta and further to the cape along the

shore of Lake Baikal, and visit the legendary Wonder-maker Orthodox Church. Upon your return to the village, you are welcome to enjoy the typical Russian banya (steam bath) and dinner and overnight with local families.

B, L, D Home stays

*The village was founded in 1673 by a Buryat individual named Soriel who moved with his family to the delta of the river. He chose this place for his residence for the following reasons. He stated, "in this place, meat could be bagged without using a knife, fish caught without tackles and wood cut without an axe". Then in 1701 a Russian named Andrei Osharovsky arrived and built his log-cabin near the place where now the Orthodox chapel is located. Later he sold his log cabin to the monks of the Posolsky Monastery located on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal.*

*In 1740 a Russian exile named Pavel Strekalovsky arrived and bought the log-cabin from the monks. Assisted by the Buryat people he built boats to develop commercial fishing and carry goods cargo across the lake. In winter he also transported goods across the lake over the ice with horse-drawn sleighs. He managed to maintain very friendly relations with local Buryat people, and taught them how to grow potatoes and wheat.*

*After the arrival of the merchant Ivan Belozertsov in the Semenikha Hollow (close to the village) the foundation was laid for 10 new households of his large family. But in 1949 during the 2nd collectivization campaign under Stalin these households were removed to the village of Bolsjoye Goloustnoye, where few of them still remain. On the edge of the village there's still a cross to be seen that used to mark the land plots of the Belozertsov family.*

*The village was conveniently located on the cross roads of local trade routes, and was a popular destination. The Russian Ambassador to China in the 18-th century used to pass by this village, and it was visited as well by Protopo Avaakuum, the founder of anarchism, Prince Kropotkin, and other prominent Russian figures.*

*The village was settled by Russians of the pure Orthodox faith. Since many of the village people depended on fishing in Lake Baikal, the most worshipped Orthodox Saint was St. Nicolas-The-Miracle-Worker. A legend says that a famous wonder Icon of St. Nicolas miraculously appeared here at the ancient place of shamanist believers. In 1701-1703 the first Orthodox Chapel was built here on request of the Cossacks. But it was deliberately burnt down by the communists in 1947. The first Orthodox Church was built in the village on February, 05, 1867, in honor of St.Nicolas from the Greek city of Mira (the Wonder-maker). It is worth noting that in the construction of the church Russian, Buryat and Evenk people took part. Since 1937 the church has not been used for Orthodox services and then later in 1941 was shut down on order of the local Soviets and of course a church left without a "master" soon dilapidated. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the funds were raised locally and internationally to restore the church.*

*The village is also the place of one of the oldest meteorological stations on Lake Baikal which has been operating since 1897. The first primary school was open here back in 1897.*

*As per the data of 1893 the population of the village was 102 people, in 1923 it consisted of 100 people belonging to the Strekalovsky family, 83 – to the Belosertsov family and 25 other people. In the vicinity of the village lived around 480 Buryat people. At time present the population of the village makes up more than 700 people.*

### **Day 3, Monday**

#### **Bolshoye Goloustnoye**

After breakfast we shall hike to the picturesque Sukhoye Ozero (Dry Lake) located 3 km away from the village, close to the tourist camp in Semenovka Hollow. The hike proceeds along an ecological path of the national park (set up in 1986) through the birch tree grove of Ushkanyi Hollow. Our local specialists will introduce to the interesting some species of local flora and fauna. A remarkable feature of the lake upon which its name is based, is that the water level in this small lake is unstable, the basin sometimes contains no water at all. The lake has been included into special registry of geological nature landmarks of the Irkutsk region. Upon reaching the Ushkanyi Hollow you will enjoy multiple views of Lake Baikal that are totally astounding. Also during the hike there is the possibility to swim in Lake Baikal in Semenikha bay where the water is much warmer than in most parts of Lake Baikal. You'll have lunch here prepared over a camp-fire featuring omul-fish that will be smoked in your presence. Afterwards you'll return to the village.

This evening, you'll enjoy the Buryat national cuisine featuring the Buryat pozy (big dumplings), lamb and other tasty and homemade entrees. And after dinner you'll enjoy a local Buryat folklore performance with lots of singing and entertainment. You'll overnight again with your family.

B, L, D Home stays

### **Day 4, Tuesday**

#### **Listvyanka**

After breakfast you'll leave your families and board a vessel for a mini-cruise to the Listvyanka village located in the mouth of the Angara River, approximately a 3/5 hour trip. A Russian-Siberian lunch shall be served on board of the vessel.

Around 2 p.m. you'll arrive in Listvyanka, to check into the Arabesque Guest Lodge. The afternoon activities include a visit to the Baikal Ecology Museum and the Baikal aquarium featuring besides various species of fish, also a couple of Lake Baikal's only mammals, the Baikal fresh water seals. Then those who want to walk to the popular St.Nicolas-the-Miracle-Worker Russian Orthodox Church built of wood without using nails. The church offers an outstanding altar decorated with beautiful iconostasis. The church is still a functional church for local people. You'll have dinner at a local restaurant.

B, L, D Arabesque Guest Lodge

### **Day 5, Wednesday**

#### **Port Baikal/Utulik**



After breakfast at 8a.m. you'll check out from the hotel and transfer again to the boat station to take a ferry for a 30-min. ride to the Port of Baikal. Here we disembark at the port to take the famous train ride along a section of the Round Baikal Railway called "The Golden Buckle of the Steel Belt of Russia", because the last Russian tsar built it at enormous cost. Now this section of the railway no longer used by the Trans-Siberian Express is considered to be the feat of railway engineering and most spectacular historic railroad of Russia.

You will ride to Sludyanka which will take more than 7 hours with 5 stops on the way to view the most spectacular and interesting sights of this unique route along Lake Baikal. After riding the train for about 2 hours, it will stop for 40 minutes in a picturesque near a small village. You'll have lunch here served as picnic (box lunches with hot tea/ coffee and drinks included).

When we reach the station of Sludyanka, you'll get off the train and transfer to the Utulik Settlement, located on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. You'll arrive in Utulik around 8pm. and you'll be accommodated in the Cedar Hotel and have dinner there and spend the night.

B, L, D Cedar Hotel

### **Day 6, Thursday**

#### **Utulik/Ulan Ude**

You'll explore the surrounding area of Ululik by an easy 2-hr hike to the waterfalls. From the top of the mountains you'll enjoy great panoramic views and have the opportunity to take wonderful pictures. After lunch in the restaurant of the hotel you'll have a guided excursion by coach to the warm lakes, located in very picturesque natural settings about 40 km from Utulik. There is an opportunity here to swim, take a canoe or go on a catamaran for a ride on the lake.

You'll return to the hotel to take a shower, and have some rest before departing for Sludyanka, where we board an overnight train to Ulan Ude. The night will be spent on the train.

B, L, D Zagan Morin Hotel

### **Day 7, Friday**

#### **Ulan Ude**

You'll arrive from Sludyanka in Ulan Ude, the capital of Buryatia, at about 6:00am and transfer to Zagan Morin. Enjoy breakfast or some free time till after lunch when you'll proceed by coach for a half-day tour of the Ivolginsky Datsan (Buddhist Temple) located in a picturesque and peaceful place named Ivolga, 23 kilometers from Ulan-Ude. The tour of the Lamaistic Temple is lead by a huvarak (monk student).



*The Ivolginsky Datsan was the only Buddhist monastery tolerated by the Communists, and is said to contain more than 1,000 Buddha statues, from small ones to the one that is 2 meters high. In its place is a gleaming three-story temple crowned with yellow eaves and guarded by stone tigers, caretaker of the heart of Buddhism in Russia. The Ivolginsky Datsan opened its Institute of Buddhist learning on its grounds which at the moment can accommodate 110 students. The property also includes a library, hotel, a philosophic faculty "Choyra", part of the Buddhist University, the Dashy Choihorlin, a museum of monuments of Buryat art, sacred tumbs called "suburgans", some service buildings and housing for the lamas. Nowadays the Ivolginsky Datsan is considered to be the center of Buddhism in Russia. It attracts a lot of tourists and believers.*



After touring the Datsan, you'll return to Ulan Ude and visit the central square of the city famous for the world's largest sculptured head of Lenin. Then you'll return to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

B, L, D Zagan Morin Hotel

### **Day 8, Saturday**

#### **Ulan Ude/Tarbagatay**

After breakfast you'll tour the city of Ulan Ude and visit the most remarkable city's sights including the Church of Odigitria and a walking excursion through the old central part with richly carved wooden house that once belonged to rich merchants.

After lunch you'll depart for Tarbagatay, the village of Old Believers, descendants of those Russian orthodox people who opposed in the 17-th century Nikon's church reforms in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and escaped to Siberia. *The culture of the village and its oral history of the "Semeiskiye" –Old Believers was proclaimed by the UNO Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization "a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity"*.



The Old Believers dressed in their bright folk costumes, wearing large amber necklaces meet us near the village and take us for a short hike up to the sacred Omulevaya Mountain. On top of this mountain from which there are great vistas of the surrounding hills and rivers, a group of the Old Believers from Trabagatay village shall give us a brief introduction to their culture. Then you'll proceed to the village Cultural Center to enjoy a great folk concert,

learn about the customs of Old Believers, and take part in their "match-making and bride & groom games" in which some of you are welcome to participate.

After the show you will follow the female leader of "semeiskiye" to her house for a **Gala Dinner at Galina's home**. The dinner besides featuring tasty homemade traditional meals of the Old Believers will be also accompanied by a number of songs performed by your hosts. Certainly, with the help of your guides you will have an excellent opportunity to talk to and learn much from the "semeiskiye" people.



After a fantastic time in Tarbagatai you will return to Ulan Ude for an overnight at the hotel.  
B. I, D Zagan Morin Hotel

## **Day 9, Saturday**

### **Ulan Ude**

After breakfast the tour end. For those returning to Irkutsk, the toru company will make reservations on the train back o Irkutsk. It is also possible to fly to Moscow and a host of other cities from Ulan Ude. Air tickets are at your own expense.

### **Details**

All lodging will be in simple hotels, lodges or home stays some of them with no private facilities. Names, addresses and additional information on accommodations will be provided three month prior to the operational date of the tour

#### **Included:**

- All transport, including transportation by ground and on the water, transfers, etc.
- All excursions as noted in the itinerary
- English speaking knowledgeable Tour Manager
- All meals as noted in the itinerary
- All accommodations as noted
- All other entrance fees to preserves and reserves

#### **Excluded:**

- International airfare and domestic airfare to Irkutsk and from Ulan Ude
- Communication costs and other personal items
- All alcohol if not provided by the local Tour Manager

### **Payment Policy**

Deposit requirement \$300 per person	Upon booking
Full Payment	45 days prior to departure

We need to secure air tickets at least 45 days out. We will transfer funds to the various tour operators and they need final payment at least 30 days in advance.

### **Refund Policy**

Initial deposit is refundable less \$100 processing costs	45 days prior to departure
45-30 days prior to departure	Fifty percent
30-day of departure	No refunds

All payments have to be made either by check or wire transfer.

### **Visas**

A visa is required for Russia. We will process your visa for you, as it requires extensive paperwork. You will receive a visa application and information as soon as we have received your deposit. Visa fees for two week processing are \$120, not including any express handling charges.

### **Pre- or post itineraries**

We will be more than happy to add additional days in Russia both pre and post to the offered itinerary.

### **Important Notes**

This itinerary takes you to one of the most remote parts of the world. All though services have improved in the last couple of years, we will encounter problems with delays, bureaucratic conditions, bad road conditions, uneven surfaces and steps and unavailability of public bathrooms. Please also note that weather circumstances may change each day's activity as to take advantage of good weather.

This program requires flexibility and good humor. Every effort will be made to follow the itinerary; however there is always the possibility of changes

We work only with tour operators who adhere to the following basic ecotourism principles.

### **Our Ecotourism Guidelines**

1. Make tourism and Conservation compatible
2. Support the preservation of wilderness and biodiversity.
3. Use natural resources in a sustainable way
4. Minimize consumption, waste and pollution
5. Respect local cultures
6. Respect historic and scientific sites

7. Communities should benefit from tourism
8. Trained staff is the key to responsible tourism
9. Make your trip an opportunity to learn about the destination and its people
10. Follow safety rules

### **Weather**

Weather during the summer season can be war and sunny. But there might be rain and storms.

Please be prepared for walks in the forest by bringing rain and sports gear and excellent hiking boots or shoes.

**Need more information, please contact:**

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