



## Lake Baikal Best Winter Bite

*Special offer combining a great tour with a chance learn and compete in ice-fishing on Lake Baikal...*

*Duration: 10 days/ 09 nights; Tour dates: March, 19-March, 20*

*"When my friends in Moscow heard I was going to Siberia in February, they said: "It's going to be cold." Actually it was not that cold. Awaiting an arctic blast as I stepped off the plane into the Siberian snow, I found myself feeling no more chilled than I would on a ski vacation. Instead of the dark, frozen place of exile that I had expected - home of the Gulag and the salt mine - I found streets of Irkutsk filled with shoppers and vendors and fur-hatted peasants carrying purchases home. Shops were stocked with fresh fruit and stylish clothing and crowded restaurants served hearty traditional food like Siberian dumplings and stews...Siberia is unexpectedly mild in winter and surprisingly sunny in the winter months, when the deep colors of the forest shine against the snow." - Andrew Rosenbaum, "Siberia Belies Its Somber Image"*

The ice and landscape of the "enchanted" Lake Baikal in winter is so unreal: like the water of the lake the ice is very clear, pure and slightly blue in color. There are literally waves frozen into bizarre shapes, and the blues and turquoise colors are amazing, set off by the orange lichens and grey rocks. The sense of peace and the obvious power of nature prevail over here. Once visiting Baikal in winter you'll go crazy snapping pictures of the ice cover of Baikal that still continues to live under and one can feel its Great breath... And walking onto the ice is a strange sensation - one can still be able to see the bottom of the lake quite clearly.

The **Baikal Best Winter Bite** tour Itinerary highlights the best of Baikal in the end of March – best time to visit this gorgeous area during the season. It allows to explore the natural taiga-woods of Baikal by snow-mobiles and unique sled-dogs, meet local people during the "Maslenitsa" -Shrovetide Festival, go fast down the Siberia's longest slide or take a horse-sleigh ride, enjoy the Siberian winter folk entertainments, meet with the real shamans, learn the culture and ways of life of the native Buryats, taste native Siberian and Russian cuisines, learn and compete in the ice-fishing on the world's deepest and largest freshwater lake, and more...

Certainly, the tour is designed for the ice-fishing lovers – both experienced and beginners alike. During the tour, you will be able to compete in a unique

**Baikal-Kamchatka Ice Fishing** tournament, enjoying both, fun of friendly competition, while staying in great outdoors that Lake Baikal offers here...

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## “BAIKAL BEST WINTER BITE’ SUGGESTED TOUR ITINERARY

### Day 1, March 19, 2016

#### *Welcome to Irkutsk – Siberia’s Microcosm and the gateway to Lake Baikal!*

Upon arrival in Irkutsk – we shall be there at the airport to meet you for a further transfer to the **Courtyard by Marriott Irkutsk City Center Hotel** – the -1<sup>st</sup> International hotel of world-famous chain in Siberia.

When checking in at deluxe rooms of the Irkutsk Courtyard by Marriott located in the historical and present downtown part of the city, enjoy welcome-drink, and after some time at leisure meet your professional bilingual guide at the lobby for a sightseeing tour of the city of Irkutsk often referred to as the Paris of Siberia, in the past.

During the city tour you shall visit the most atmospheric sites of Irkutsk including Znamenskaya Orthodox Cathedral famous for a rich collection of icons; graves of the Decembrists’ revolutionaries who were exiled by the tsar to Siberia for the ill-fated attempt to overthrow the tsar in December, 1825; and grave of so-called Russian Columbus –Gregory Shelekhov – an early Russian explorer of Alaska. We will also then have opportunities to take pictures of richly carved old-style wooden houses, see the Monument to Russian Pioneers of Siberia topped by the bronze figure of Alexander-the 3rd, the White House of Siberian Province as well as visit the local bazaar.



After dinner served at the hotel we welcome you to one of the cozy meeting rooms of the hotel for the slides presentation and orientation lecture on the upcoming the next days tour itinerary.

### Day 2, March 20, 2016

After breakfast we check out from the Marriott for a transfer to Listvyanka settlement located in the outflow of the Angara river from Lake Baikal and 62 km from the city of Irkutsk.

Approaching Baikal we stop in the source of the Angara River from Lake Baikal near the Shaman rock associated with many popular legends. After taking pictures here and learning about some ancient customs of local people, we proceed a short distance further to have lunch of tasty Siberian-Baikal cuisine to be served at a very popular “Proshly Vek” (meaning “Past Century”) water front restaurant. After lunch we will have a guided tour of Baikal Ecology Museum which has a nice display of unique exhibits of the lake’s flora and fauna, see an interesting video about Lake Baikal and also visit the Baikal fresh water seal aquarium. After the tour of this interesting museum we shall drive to check in at the Legend of Baikal Hotel located on the shore of Baikal right opposite the Shaman Rock in the source of the Angara river.

After check in at the “Legend of Baikal” Hotel enjoy some time at leisure before dinner to be served at the hotel.



### Day 3, March 21, 2016 - Explorations of the Baikal Taiga-woods by snowmobile and husky sleds

.Today we explore the nearby premises of the Pribaikalsky National Park, one of the largest in Russia, covering an area of some 417,000 hectares and encompassing much of the western shoreline of Lake Baikal. It presents a landscape of mountains and sub-alpine meadows, coniferous forests and steppes. Today we aim to explore by snowmobile and husky sleds something of the taiga-woods that cover the wild backcountry. The forested shoreline around Baikal is home to the brown bear, the “Lords of the Taiga”, as well as elk, deer and moose. Departing after breakfast we will journey towards the Chelpanov Meadows, getting the feel of our snowmobiles and practising riding them across this pristine landscape, before taking the opportunity to enjoy a ride through the area on Siberian husky sleds.

We will have an exciting trail and thrilling ride in the great outdoors with spectacular views of the taiga-woods enchanted in snow, led by professional dog sledding musher and the owner of the Baikal Sled-Dogs Center- Oleg Tyuryumin, and with 2 dog-champions of Russia – Bell and Jazz. We will ride true and unique breed of the Kamchatka huskies developed by nature with no human intrusion. These riding dogs have in the ancient past inherited their ancestors’ – wolves’ - exceptional quick-wittedness...And after few generations that were spent on the shores of Lake Baikal these great outdoor dogs, surely, acquired another specific feature in their character: this is greatness of that Energy that Baikal grants any being living in harmony with Mother Nature.



Under the expert guidance of the mushers – Oleg Turumin and his wife Natasha who're hooked on winter wilderness -you'll gain some understanding of the basic commands, techniques and sled control.

Returning to the meadows we then partake in a picnic lunch, enjoying some delicious smoked omul –endemic fish of Baikal (a distant relative of the salmon) or an al fresco barbeque.

This afternoon gives us the opportunity to continue our exploration of this stunning area, before returning to our hotel.

We will have some time at leisure before taking a walk to visit the local Saint Nicolas Orthodox wooden church built without use of nails in the end of the 19-th century, and that has a very nice iconostasis.

To have dinner we will walk to one of the popular restaurant serving local and Russian cuisine where we can order the meals up to one's taste or preference.

#### Day 4, March 22, 2016- The "TALTSY" Open-Air Muesum of Wooden Houses

After breakfast we'll depart for a guided tour of the Taltsy Open-Air Museum of Wooden Architecture—the place for all people to experience the history and traditions of the peoples of Siberia-Buryats, Evenks and Russians.

The Taltsy Museum is a unique display of original wooden structures scattered all over the large area and complete with great number of household items dating back to XVII-XIX cent. This one-of-a-kind exhibition including both native Siberians' and Russian sections, unfolds in a truly exciting story about Siberia's past: farmsteads of well-to-do peasant families, huts, log cabins and houses built of pine and larch-tree, broad back yards, storehouses, utensils, and even dog houses – all of them are genuine. In this museum you can take pictures of an authentic distaff, Russian fire stove with "palati" (sleeping boards), and icons placed in the so-called "red" corner and many more. Wandering around this wooden museum-village, especially when there's so much snow about an during the Pan Cake week, will be real fun as well as give an idea as to what life may have been like back in those days

After the tour of Museum one can enjoy horse sleigh ride (optional if available) which in the museum surroundings will make you feel like taking a special tour into the past Russian history, and also you'll be involved in a number of traditional Russian folk games.



For those who like a quick ride, the employees of the museum "Taltsy" usually build a traditional Russian slide and a snow carousel. To ride down here the Russian slide claimed to be the longest one in Siberia people use cow and sheep hides that were previously soaked in warm water and then left to freeze. People queue up to experience sliding down the track as fast as the wind – the insiders of this one-of-a-kind "slide sports" confirm that it is possible to reach a speed of 50 km per hour going down from the top of the slide to the Angara river bank. For the lovers of another old tradition, the employees of the museum also erect an old fashioned Russian snow carousel, on which you can prove your sporting spirit not only by trying to turn the carousel as fast as you can, but simply by your ability to stay on the toboggan...

After much fun in the museums great environment and historical outdoors we then will have tea-party with pan-cakes –the "bliny" - essential element of Maslenitsa celebration popularly taken to symbolize the sun. Round and golden, they are made from the rich

foods still allowed by the Orthodox traditions: butter, eggs, and milk. We will eat the "blynis" in the village pub of the Museum the way Russian people in Siberia usually do (with honey, sour cream, moss berries etc.)

After having enjoyed our time spent at the "Taltsy" Wooden Architecture & Ethnographic museum in the open-air we shall drive to Irkusk for dinner and overnight at the Courtyard by Marriott Irkutsk City Center hotel.

#### Day 5- March 23, 2016

##### Exploring the cuture of the native Buryat people in Ust-Orda.

After breakfast we check out from the hotel and depart to the Ust-Orda settlement – the central town of the Buryat national district located about 70 km away from the city of Irkutsk. Counting the remaining of 45 km to Irkutsk from the Taltsy museum total distance to drive shall be 115 km.

En route our way we shall stop at the holy «obo»- sight of worship by local shamanist believers where following the ancient local customs you'll be invited to "sprinkle some vodka or milk " and tie ribbons on the bushes as if to do offering to the local master-spirits and win them over.



Upon arrival in Ust-Orda we shall drive to the Metelitsa ( meaning "snow storm" ) guest center to check in at this cozy lodge ( rooms with modern amenities) . Then enjoy a tasty dinner and have an overnight at this cozy Metelitsa guest lodge.



This full day we will be exploring the town of Ust-Orda populated mostly by the Buryats, a native Siberian people whose history and culture closely relate to that of their southern Mongolian neighbors. The largest of the indigenous Asian tribes in the region, the Buryats are spread across Siberia, stretching from the Mongolian border to the western fringes of Lake Baikal. The area around Ust Orda is the heart of the shamanism religion, believed to have been the oldest practiced form of this ancient worship.

We shall have a guided tour of the local Buryat National Ethnography Museum which excellent exhibition has on display a great number of interesting items relating to ancient archeological and old shamanistic past. A visit to the museum today will enlighten us on the traditions, lives and cultural mores of these fascinating people.

After having lunch we will proceed to meet famous Buryat artist – a celebrity, handicraftswoman and designer Angelica Alsatkina- at her workshop premises. We'll see Angelica or her apprentices at arts work, watch the working hands of masters in process, and hear their explanations about why and how they do it, what moves them... They will, certainly, be open to you and very much honest. be honest and eager then try.

Then and back to our "Snowstorm" Guest Lodge we shall have before dinner an enjoyable visit to the Sauna which is a modern and quite a spacious facility here, and besides sweat-room and washing facilities has a nice pool for bathing. Today this "sauna" facility will be a kind of training for you to get well prepared for the upcoming in 2 days visit to a real, authentic Siberian "Banya" – steam-bath on the Olkhon Island...Your guide will explain to you some of the basic and important things about the Russian sauna called locally "banya".

After the sauna we will have dinner of authentic and very natural Buryat national cuisine featuring such entrees as some Buryat specialties -"salamat" – fried flour with Sauer cream, home made noodle and "bukhler" – soup with mutton, "pozy" –big meat dumplings cooked on steam, mutton ribs, and some more tasty entrees. Besides, the Buryat hosts will offer us to try their "tarasun"- milk moonshine/ low proof Buryat "vodka". At dinner, also enjoy the Buryat folklore performance. The local folk ensemble will perform several Buryat folk songs about life of the Buryats, their love for natural world and respect for the ancestral spirits and local deities, about Glorious Sea- Holy Baikal. We will have a nice opportunity to learn about the culture and ways of life of the western Buryats. Finally, the Buryats will invite you to dance with them their national "youhor" circle dance. After a briefing and short training exercise, you'll definitely like dancing the "youhor" together with these charming Buryat people. This will be a great entertainment, trust us!



Well entertained and with new interesting knowledge and experience we'll spend a night at the "Metelitsa" – Snowstorm guest lodge.

**Day 6., March 24, 2016 -On the way to Olkhon Island – the Heart of Baikal**

After breakfast this morning we will drive overland by vans to the 'Small Seas' area of Baikal and the stunning setting of Olkhon Island. 50 km north of Ust-Orda and 200 km north of Irkutsk, our van turns east, towards Baikal, and heads up into the highlands and mountains, which surround the Lake. Shortly before the paved road ends and at the high point, which marks the border between regions, is a special place where offerings with vodka sprinkling are made and colorful ribbons tied on the bushes in respect to Bourhan, the native god.



Our next stop before the Small Sea shall be then at Elantsy settlement to meet famous local shaman Valentin Khagdaev (9th-generation hereditary shaman) who besides just being our hospitable host will tell us about the culture of Buryats and their shamanistic practices. Following his clan's traditions Valentin preserves the ancestors' knowledge, culture, as well as he is well familiar with healing secrets. During meeting, the shaman will tell you about shamanism, good and evil spirits of Baikal, local customs and everyday life, probably even sing shaman's songs, read a poem or two about legendary hero of the Buryat epos Gesser, finally he will kindly answer your questions. After homemade lunch to be served in the roadside restaurant we continue further.

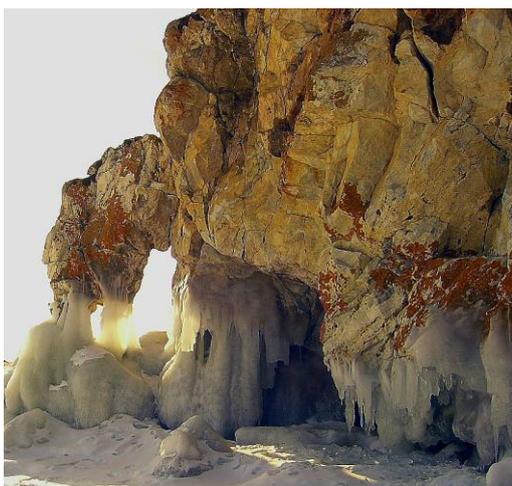


Very soon we get to the MRS settlement to find ourselves right before the biggest island on Lake Baikal – Olkhon. It stretches for 72 km from the North to the South and separates the strait which is called Maloye More or The Small Sea. The island's comparatively small territory is a combination of taiga, steppe and even a small desert. Its flora and fauna are unusual too. It is believed Olkhon is the home of many tribes and peoples of Central Asia such as huns, turks, and kurykans. One of the legends says "the conqueror of the Universe" Chinghis Khan is buried here.

Amidst this landscape of superlatives, Olkhon is, without doubt, one of the jewels in Baikal's glittering crown. The island is considered by the Buryat people to be one of the most important centres in the region for Shamanism, and is believed to be one of the 5 global poles of shamanic energy, and one of the most sacred places in Asia.

Split almost diagonally by a glorious natural barrier of steppes and taiga forest it is a superb spot to enjoy the visual spectacle of the lake and appreciate something of its awesome grandeur.

At MRS- Sakhurta settlement we cross to the island via the ice, travelling along a prepared stretch of 'ice-highway' towards our homestead accommodation at the islanders' central settlement of Khuzhir. ( If the official road on the ice is closed for the car and vans because of safety, then we will take a hovercraft transfer from the mainland to the Olkhon Island).



Upon arrival at the "Sunny" guest lodge ( or Nikita Benhcarov's homestead – accommodation in rooms with modern amenities) and check in cosy and comfortable rooms we shall venture out again, exploring the fishermen's settlement of Khuzir. Here we will visit one of Asia's Holly-of-hollies both for shamanist believers and Buddhists alike - the Shaman Rock often referred to as the Altar of Rock at Burhan Cape. This cape is associated with many legends and is the place where shamans of the whole Baikal area and even Mongolia held their tailagans (gatherings) and carried on shamanic rituals. The locals believe the spirit of Baikal lives inside the Cliff, and the Buryat custom prohibits young ladies to approach the Cliff. Here your guide will show you some mysterious inscriptions in Sanskrit and the Shaman mask depicted on the Cliff.

*The largest island on the lake, Olkhon can certainly boast some of its finest landscapes and the views from the north of the island offer unrestricted views across the lake. The geographical and spiritual heart of Lake Baikal, the island is steeped in legend and myth. It is believed to be the home of ancient spirits and one local legend also has it that Genghis Khan, the 'conqueror of the universe' is buried here.*

From here we can contemplate a serene landscape of empty beaches, the pristine ice frozen waters of the Maloe More (Little Sea). Visiting a local museum we will learn a little more of the island and its community, before returning for dinner and overnight at the "Sunny" lodge.

**Day 7- March 25 2016 - Khoboy Cape and Learning local skills of ice-fishing**

Today before lunch we set out for an exciting excursion around the island, first driving to the northernmost point, the Cape of Khoboy (translation: "fang"). The Cape is located at the widest point of Lake Baikal and offers the best views of the Eastern and Western shores. For the local shamanist believers, the site is a sacred spot.

We drive by 4-WD van to the northern extremes of the island today and the beautiful Cape Khoboy (meaning "Fang") which rocky shape reminds of a female's head with breast. Alexander Aristarkhov, a Russian traveler, was very impressed by his visit to the Khoboy Cape, and later wrote:

*"Once when we went to Khoboi, the northernmost point of Olkhon Island...I was offered to visit the Virgin Cave. I followed the advice and was awarded with a unique sight. The entrance was adorned with an ornament of ice crystals and icicles, inside there were "crystal chandeliers", fantastically congealing in the blue twilight. Pristine silence reigned in the mysterious cave. It was a bit harder to get into smaller caves. Ice outgrowth entirely covering all the cliffs hid a number of grottoes. To get inside one should lie down on the ice and crawl under the hanging icicles and hemlocks. If succeeding in doing so, you will find yourself in the other world filled with ghostly blue light and crystal pearls. It is an enchanting sight, indeed! Sitting with our back to the rock (it was not always possible to be to our full height) we enjoyed light tinges on the ice crystals being perfectly aware that no film could convey it...."*



When we arrive at the islands northernmost point you will see across Maloye and Bolshoye More ( Big and Small Seas of Baikal) and, on a good day, as far as the Ushkanii Islands and Svyatoy Nos on the eastern shore of the lake can also be seen.

At this time , when spring is in the air, one can also see from atop of the Hoboy cape the famed freshwater seals of Baikal, the nerpa, the only freshwater seals in the world. The Baikal nerpa-seal spends most of its life in water, surfacing periodically to breathe. Thanks to the capacity of its blood to hold oxygen nerpa can remain under water for up to 45-60 minutes, although it usually stays there for 20-25 minutes, this is sufficient for it to catch food or escape danger. In water it can reach speeds of up to 25 kilometers an hour, but in normal circumstances it will swim at half the speed. In winter, when Baikal is frozen over, nerpa makes escape holes in the ice. With luck, we can find them in their natural habitat. How the freshwater seal came to be in Lake Baikal is still a mystery; the lake is hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean.

Upon return back to our lodge, we shall have lunch. And then you will have brief but very useful and learning ice fishing course to get prepared to participation in the 11 edition of Baikal Kamchatka Open Ice Fishing Contest.



Lake Baikal ice fishing is a distinctive art, and instruction and some practice are needed to hook and land a fish. The line is lowered into the ice hole approximately 12 meters - that is, to the depth at which the omul are biting, and jiggged up and down constantly while trying to adjust the depth to find the fish. When an omul-fish tugs at a lure, the fisherman begins a sharp and rapid retrieval of line and fish from the depths. When done by an expert in the “kamchatka” this is a rapid, effective, and graceful procedure.

Led by a local expert in fishing you will certainly understand how to fish through ice more efficiently...

On return back to the hotel enjoy dinner followed by the brief orientation lecture given by your ice-fishing team leader.

**Note: This evening and before dinner captains of your ice-fishing teams will attend the Baikal Kamchatka Rules meeting to partake in the fishing zones draw and final briefing to get last details on the ice-fishing tournament to be held tomorrow.**

**Day 8- March 26, 2016 -Baikal Kamchatka Ice Fishing Open Contest nt.**

This day we shall spend trying to win in the Baikal Kamchatka Ice Fishin Open Contest. Following the Rules of the BK (click the web-link [here](#) ) and before lunch we shall be competing in fishing through the ice-holes. Perhaps, some of you will be in the winning teams, or even get the BIG Fish Plaque..

Before lunch the Baikal Kamchatka contest fishing shall be stopped and the result of the competition summed up, and winners will be rewarded. Later today, and after the picnic-lunch on the ice there will be offered the chance to try a Baikal-Siberian Banya, a bathhouse and steam room that is believed to revive the spirit since inside a fire heats up stones and water causing the temperature sometimes rise as much as 115 degrees Celsius. During your stay in the Banya you will be offered our special tea and home made soft drinks and freshen-ups

After the Banya this evening and at Gala-dinner time ( Baikal Farewell Party) we will be entertained with traditional stories of the local taiga dwellers, affording us the chance to learn a little more first-hand knowledge of life amongst these icy climes. Also we shall learn today a famous Russian song “Glorious Sea-Holy Baikal” .



**Day 9, March 27, 2016 – return to Irkutsk**

After breakfast we will depaert to Irkutsk with lunch en route in a roadside cafeteria. . In 4 hours including a couple of stops on the way to stretch your legs Upon arrival – check in at the “MARRIOTT” Hotel, have dinner and overnight at the hotel.

**Day 10, March 28, 2016**

After breakfast – check out from the hotel for a trnsafer to the airport/ railway station to take ...

**Have An Enjoyable Trip Back Home!!**

