

Cycling in the Heart of Lake Baikal

Duration: 7 days; Group size: min. 5 - max. 12 persons; Availability: June, 05 - September, 15



Below offered tour itinerary is for those who like to combine active outdoor leisure such as biking with cultural adventure. While on this tour, besides having an opportunity to bike along entire Island of Olkhon— sacral center of lake Baikal, its biggest and the only inhabited island, you will also be able to get in touch with ancient shamanism religion and worships of local Buryat people, having local shaman as your interlocutor attend your camp-fire on one of the evenings, see the Holy of Hollies of both shamanist and Buddhist believers, experience way of living in round shaped felt yurts of Buryats with comfort and tranquility at your door as well as explore the remains of ancient fortifications of Kurakany people – “legendary blacksmith tribe” of Lake Baikal area, and, perhaps, observe the lake’s only aquatic mammals and a mystery of Baikal to be yet unraveled – Baikal fresh-water seals.

And, well again, we will manage to achieve smooth running of the tour and allow for more opportunities for our this tour participants to observe local surroundings en route and learn more things about Lake Baikal area with less strenuous activities. During the whole tour itinerary run and especially during the full-day biking trips for distances over 25 km with overnight in the tents, Absolute Siberia provides a separate 4-WD vehicle to carry your sleeping bags, tents, food and other camping gear. Thus logistics of the program enables Absolute Siberia to have least tour impact, if any at all, from the tour operations on natural and human environment. However, being on the tour does require though some biking experience , the tour is designed for everyone who is not less than moderately fit and knows what biking is.

We welcome you to bike though the Heart of Lake Baikal exploring its natural splendor while following “Leave No Trace in Nature” principles!

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1

Welcome to Irkutsk - “Paris of Siberia”, capital of its great Eastern part –Siberia’s Microcosm and the gateway to “Siberia’s” Pearl - Lake Baikal!

Upon arrival we meet you with professional bilingual guide, assist with the luggage, load your bikes on the truck and get ourselves on the coach for nearly 6-hour transfer to Olkhon Island and then further to Harmony Yurt Camp (total distance of about 300 km). En route on the highest highway elevation we shall stop at the so-called “oboo”-site, holy place for local people for the so-called “eijiins” or master spirit of the area are believed to reside here and have to be worshiped. For this reason anyone passing by the spot is supposed to stop here and sprinkle some vodka or white fermented milk drink, tie ribbons on the bushes in order to show



respect for the spirits. We shall not be excluded from this custom and do same thing to win over the spirits and request from them some luck and good weather in the upcoming days!

Our next stop will be in a typical Petrovka village to have lunch at the private cafeteria built in wooden yurt style. Here we will try tasty Buryat national "boozzi" stuffed with meat (Please, note there won't be a problem at any times for us to provide a vegetarian menu on your prior request!).

After lunch we continue our drive for another 11 km to reach Elantsy settlement- administrative center of Olkhon district and then in 45 km we get to Sakhuyrte village (called sometimes as MRS, an abbreviation which stands for Machine-Repair Station). Here we will get a transfer by ferry across Olkhon Gates Strait of the Small Sea of Lake Baikal to the Island of Olkhon. Upon getting to Olkhon we proceed further by coach/vans a distance of nearly 50 km via Khuzhir settlement to the Harmony Yurt Camp which is our final destination for today. The camp is located in a very picturesque natural setting next to a small village of Kharantsy, near the beach of fine sand. The camp has modern amenities-toilets, sinks and showers for common use of all guests, a separate dining yurt and steam-bath structures.

Upon arrival in the camp we check in at round shaped felt yurts, enjoy dinner of a profound meal and then get a chance to visit Siberian steam-bath – "Banya" followed by swim in refreshing waters of Baikal (when you wish to get younger or as just delivered!) (additional service)

Then experience your first overnight in cozy and "cosmic" felt yurts (we bet you'll softly sleep in harmony with nature and like a baby in a cradle!)

Day 2

After breakfast we check our bikes and then start out from the camp for full-day trip to Hoboy Cape, the northernmost point of Olkhon Island, located at the distance of 40 km from the yurt camp. In about 15 km after the start we get to famous Olkhon Sand Dunes once a site of fishermen's village abandoned by people in early 1970-s due to the sands from the sea shore having been moved by permanently blowing winds here covered the entire area of the former village leaving no chance for people to keep their households. Near the sand dunes we will have lunch, relax a bit to continue our biking trip. Next the landscape slightly changes turning into kind of steppe area through which we ride to get to our next stop at Tsagaan Khushun Cape ("White Cape"). Formed of crystal limestone and covered with colorful lichens and so-called "God-delivered tea grass" this 1-km long picturesque cape is one of the very rare places in the north of Olkhon with direct access to the water. From here you'll enjoy views of so-called "Three Brothers Cliffs" with tiny caves associated with interesting legend that your guide is sure to tell.





Here in a small and cozy bay of Tsagaan Khushun Cape we set up our tent camp, have dinner prepared over the camp fire while watching sunset over Baikal. We overnight in tents under starry Baikal skies.

Note: Please, during overnights in tents near or on the shore of Lake Baikal or at sites not well designed for camping we will strongly recommend our tour participants at any times not to wash themselves with soap or brush your teeth with paste, or apply any other materials containing any chemicals common for use by humans directly in Lake Baikal or any other natural water spring. We

expect this to be done at least 15 meters from the water near a small dug out to be prepared by your Russian tour escorts. We also kindly ask you to remind your local tour escorts thereof in case by some reason they did not follow this rule themselves. By doing so and with such a small thing you do help preservation of this tremendously unique body of fresh water which is not just one nation's property or just the "pearl of Siberia", but is the treasure of the world and well of the planet Earth.

Day 3

This morning after breakfast we will undertake an easy hike to the northernmost point of Olkhon- the Cape of Khoboy (meaning "Fang") which rocky shape reminds of a female's head with brust. The cape located amidst the widest part of Lake Baikal and featuring great echo effect is also regarded by the shamanist believers as a sacred spot which even nowadays is used by local acting shamans for holding their "tailgaan" gatherings with special rituals carried on here, and the sound of played drum being heard from a far-a-way distance. In other words, this place providing great vistas of Baikal water surface with views of eastern and western shores is also a great spot for meditation. Besides, during calm weather at the cape one can often observe Baikal freshwater seals that frequently come close to the shore here and show up from the water. So, plenty of opportunities to relax and rejoin mother-nature here as well as to take pictures await you here at the Hoboy Cape!

After exploring the Hoboy surroundings we set off biking to our next destination – to Uzury Retreat Bay on the eastern side of Olkhon Island , location of local Meteorological Station, where we will have lunch as picnic with snack, hot tea/coffee on the shore. Then we continue further heading back to the Yurt camp where we spent our first overnight on the Island. Upon getting back to the yurt camp and accommodation we will have dinner to be then followed by a special meeting with local shaman Valentin Khagdaev. During the meeting this shaman will tell you about both shamanism beliefs and Buryat-Mongolia culture as well as perform for us the shamanistic rite of Purification in

which our tour participants shall be involved. The rest of your time before going to bed in your felt yours this evening you may spend by the camp-fire or be engaged in other activities organized by the camp staff for the guests.



Day 4

Today you'll cycle the Island from west to east – from the yurt camp to Tashkiney lake for approximately 36 roundtrip km. After picnic and rest, as you travel back to the yurt camp make a stop near a salted lake – a natural wonder in the middle of a freshwater Ocean.

Day 5

Today we have our last breakfast in the yurts, then load our main luggage onto the van and

after checking out from the Harmony yurt camp we start biking to our next destinations. First we shall bike via Khuzhir settlement to Holy of Hollies of shamanist and Buddhist believers – the Shamanka Craig, which once was even visited by the Dalai-Lama who had carried on special service near the Altar-of-Rock which is kept in a small cave inside the Craig that also has some mysterious inscriptions in Sanskrit. Here your guide will put a task before you to find the mage of the Shaman mask also depicted on the Craig, and if you fail – he'll definitely show it for you. After exploring this Shamanka Craig and paying our credit to the deities of Lake Baikal and the mighty Burkhan-Egi – the ruler of Baikal underwater kingdom, we shall proceed by bike further. Then we will have a brief tour of the Local Lore Museum and listen to a story about the Island formation, the worship images of locals, and certainly about unique features of Lake Baikal.

Afterwards, our next and final for today destination for biking will be Horgoy Cape (about 30 km), famous for the fortifications remains built III-IV century A.D. by a legendary Kuryakany people, the founders of outstanding "Kurumchi Culture" who once inhabited the Island of Olkhon and kept it as their bastion against any enemy until the Mongol tribes invaded this territory.

We will have lunch as picnic on the way to Horgoy (by the time we arrive on bikes to the picnic site your meals shall already be prepared so that you would be able to rest a bit after lunch and then to continue. Upon arrival to Horgoy Cape we see the fortifications without approaching them closer than 1, 5 meter, learn about the Kurumchi culture of Kurikany tribe, take pictures.

Dinner will be prepared over and served at the camp-fire in the tent camp set up for you in a small bay near the shore. We spend our last night on Olkhon in the tents enjoying the sights of the passing away day.



Day 6

After breakfast we get our things packed, loaded onto the van and then go biking along our last portion of the trip on Olkhon, heading for the ferry station. After getting our transfer across the Small Gates Strait we get on the coach for 5-hour transfer to Irkutsk. Lunch en route shall be provided in a roadside cafeteria. Around 3 p.m. we get to our hotel, check in and after short time at leisure we will go on a sightseeing tour of Irkutsk which will include visits to city's most interesting and atmospheric sights. After the tour of the city we get back to the hotel to enjoy Farewell Gala Dinner followed by a Baikal Biker Certificate Award to each of the tour participants.

Day 7

We'll check out from the hotel after early breakfast and depart by coach to Irkutsk airport for boarding the aircraft for your flight back home.

