



Photos: Claes Grundsten



Photo: Jan Wigsten

## Altai Sayan Traverse - Mongolia to Russia

The Altai Sayan EcoRegion has been identified by WWF as one of their Global 200 regions in which more than 90 percent of the planet's biodiversity is concentrated. The major part of this EcoRegion is shared by Russia and Mongolia. The minor part also includes China and Kazakhstan. The Altai Mountains divide them. The highlands of Mongolia are dry steppes with snow-capped mountains, whereas the lower elevation western parts in Russia are largely forested, being part of southernmost Siberia, with its own micro-climate. The Russian part is significantly more humid and wet. There are excellent apples and different kinds of berries to be found in season. Kazakhs, Russians and Altai peoples inhabit Respublika Altai. The Mongolian side is also mostly Kazakh, but there are also Tuvans, Mongols and many other ethnic minorities. The local people in the region speak a variety of local languages, which are part of the Slavic, Mongol, Turkic and Altai language groups.

### Brief Outline Itinerary

This journey starts in Ölgii which has the westernmost airport in Mongolia. There are flights from the capital Ulaanbaatar and also Almaty and Ust-Kamenogorsk in Kazakhstan. There are a number of extension trips in westernmost Mongolia. International flight connections are best negotiated with Russian Aeroflot Airlines, who fly to both Barnaul (BAX) and Ulaanbaatar (ULN). Your trip is vehicle supported. We will make use of local hotels in Russia and a ger camp at Sagsay near Ölgii. The border crossing at Tashanta (Russia) and Tsagaan-nuur (Mongolia) opened for third country nationals in 2005.

#### Day 1 To Ölgii

Arrive in Ölgii. Go to the Blue Wolf Restaurant & Bar in Ölgii or arrange to be met at the airport. Visit Ölgii, a small Kazakh town. There are some handicraft shops, a square, a provincial museum, an interesting mosque and a marketplace, (here called a bazaar, of course). Bayan-Ölgii has many ethnic minorities, but around 80 percent are Kazakhs, who are Muslims and a Turkic-speaking people. Most people here speak also Mongolian. We transfer to the nearby village of Sagsay. Overnight at the Blue Wolf Ger Camp.

#### Day 2 To Mangerok

We depart Sagsay and Ölgii very early and drive about two hours on a gravel road towards the Mongolian border post at Tsagaan Nuur. The border crossing takes anywhere from an hour to a couple of hours. Once cleared we drive on the Kosh-Agach Plateau. It is a spectacular journey on a good tarmac road, down several valleys, until we almost reach the tree line. We will have our lunch en route. The Katun and Choy Rivers follow the road. The surrounding mountains are high, often with snow-capped peaks.



Forests occur as soon as the elevation is lower. There will be cedars at Seminskiy. We will pass several villages, such as Ondugai, where Turkic-speaking Altai people live.

Arrive at Mangerok, 540km into Russia from the Tashanta border. Accommodation at the base camp in Mangerok.

### Day 3 Patmos and Barnaul

In the morning we will depart up the Katun River to Chemal village to visit the small and spectacularly located – on a rock island in the middle of the Katun River - nunnery of Patmos monastery. There are some 50 nuns in residence. We will walk across the hanging bridge to the nunnery.

Makariya was a priest who converted the indigenous Turkic speaking Altai people to Christianity at the end of the 1700s, although they also remain shamanistic today. The area is 400-500 meters above sea level with broad leaf forests of linden, birch and aspen as well as cedars and larch. Other plants include woodruff and asarum. Some of the species are common on the Russian Plains and Russian Far East but not in Siberia. We will pass through the village of Ondugai. In the afternoon, we will drive to Barnaul, and overnight at Hotel Centralnaya.

### Day 4 Tour ends

After breakfast, our services will conclude with your transfer to Barnaul airport. Most flights depart in the very early morning for Moscow Sheremeteyevo One airport. If you fly to Moscow you will arrive well before lunch time, which will allow you time for most connecting flights leaving Moscow Sheremeteyevo Two airport.

**PRICE ex Barnaul 4d/3n:  
USD 1355 per person (2 members)**

Single room/tent supplement:  
**USD 115 per night**

**Includes:** All meals. All overnights in Ger Camp (1n), base camp (1n) and hotel in Russia (1n). All local transport. Park entry fee. Local guide from Ölgii and Barnaul, respectively.

**Excludes:** Imported drinks. Laundry. Air or train tickets in and out of Russia/Mongolia. Domestic flight in Russia. Services in Moscow. Visa fees.

**Flight directions:** You are best off booking Aeroflot flights, which serve Barnaul and Ulaanbaatar and then connect to the rest of the world. This means that they are likely to offer the lowest fares. Flights from Barnaul to Moscow are always in the early morning as day flights. Due to local time zones, you will arrive in Moscow only one hour later local time, which means you have the whole day for your connection to other parts of the world. Flights direct to Ölgii from Ulaanbaatar departs Thursdays and Saturdays at cost USD 337 per person one way (Feb 2009). There are flights to nearby airports (except Sundays) on other days, which are within one easy day drive from Ölgii.

**Moscow and Ulaanbaatar:** These are the gateways cities for this remote journey. It is, of course, possible and recommended to take advantage of being there and book stop-overs in both cities. Moscow is affluent and pricey.

**Hazard:** If you take an onward flight from Moscow, we recommend that you use the same airline. Usually this would be Aeroflot, as they would then be responsible for your onward connection.

**DATES ex Ulaanbaatar:**  
Every Thursday and Saturday

Reservations: