



Photo: Jan Wigsten



Photos: Claes Grundsten

## Altai Sayan Traverse - Russia to Mongolia

*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

You will fly to Barnaul (Russian Altai region) via Moscow. There are a number of extension trips available in westernmost Mongolia. Flight connections are best negotiated with Russian Aeroflot Airlines who fly to both Barnaul (BAX) and Ulaanbaatar (ULN). The trip is vehicle supported. We will make use of the base camp of Altaian ails in Russia and a ger camp at Sagsay near Ölgii, where double occupancy accommodation can be provided. Between these places there will be one night of tent camping. Cooks and guide are brought along for the journey near the Russian-Mongolian frontier. The border crossing at Tashanta (Russia) and Tsaa-gannuur (Mongolia) is open for third country nationals as of 2005.

#### Day 1 To Moscow

You have a full day after your arrival in Moscow. At Moscow international airport (Sheremetyevo II) take the free shuttle to the nearby Novotel and spend the time before your next flight relaxing there. There is a sauna, restaurants, wireless internet, pub etc. Take a taxi from the hotel (or airport to airport shuttle) at your own expense and transfer to Sheremetyevo I airport. Check/in for the overnight flight to Barnaul in southernmost Siberia. Please note the Moscow domestic airport is a separate airport and somewhat distant from the international airport.

#### Day 2 To Katun River

Arrive Barnaul in the early morning. It is the largest and least attractive city of the region with some 700 000 inhabitants. Barnaul is the urban hub for the Altai region. We will be invited for breakfast and registration procedures will take place here. Our bus or car will take us 440km towards the Altai Mountains. We will stop for lunch at a Café in Biysk town. Later the road will run parallel to the spectacular Katun River, which is a tributary of the mighty Siberian river Yenisey.



The area is 400-500 meters above sea level with plenty of broad leaf forests with linden, birch, 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 arrive at the village of Ondugai and accommodate ourselves at a base camp in Altaian ails. This will be at either Tudtyiaruk or Uch-Enmek. There will be tepee-like indigenous dwellings crafted in wood.

### Day 3 Uch-Enmek

Full day exploration on foot of the nearby area. There are deer stones from the Scythians, which are related to the time of the Pazyryk grave. The landscape is spectacular and we are now on the green side of Altai. There are double or twin bedded accommodation but the toilets are in separate buildings. Enjoy a sauna (Russian banya).

### Day 4 To Kurai area

Today we will drive for about 220km gaining elevation towards the Mongolian highlands, crossing several mountain passes. It is a spectacular road journey on a good tarmac road, up several valleys, until we reach almost to 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. We will pass several villages, such as Ondugai, where Turkic-speaking Altai people live. Overnight at a ger camp.

### Day 5 Kosh Agach Plateau to Ölgii

Continue to drive up on to the Kosh Agach Plateau, from which Mongolia is visible. The area is now drier with some 160mm precipitation per annum. Kosh Agach is the main town. Almost all people living here are Kazakhs. We will cross into Mongolia after the small village of Tashanta. It will certainly take at least an hour of formalities for both sides. The goods roads will totally disappear as we enter into Mongolia. From the border there is a spectacular 2-3 hour ride across the mountain steppes to Ölgii. Ger camp overnight at Sagsay, half an hour drive outside Ölgii.

### Day 6 End services

After breakfast we will transfer you to your next destination, be it a flight to Ulaanbaatar or to continue with any of our additional itineraries in western Mongolia. The town of Hovd is a 5-6 hour drive away, which will cost an additional USD 270 for one vehicle with driver.

### Flight directions:

You are best off booking Aeroflot flights, which serve both Barnaul and Ulaanbaatar and then connect to the rest of the world. This means they are likely to offer the lowest fares. This trip also operates in reverse at some additional cost (longer trip length). Flights from Barnaul to Moscow are always in the early morning as day flights.

### Moscow and Ulaanbaatar:

These are the gateway 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.

**PRICE ex Barnaul 5d/4n:**  
**USD 1795 per person (2 members)**

Single room supplement: **USD 80 per night**

**Includes:** All meals. All overnights in Ger Camp (1n), tents (1n) and hotel in Russia (2n). All local transport. Park entry fee. Local cook and 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. Single supplement. Domestic flight Ölgii-Ulaanbaatar is USD 337 per person one way (Feb 2009).

**Hazards:** You need to plan to stay in Mongolia for at least 2 nights after the flight from western Mongolia to Ulaanbaatar. Flights from the interior may cancel due to poor visibility (rain/fog) anywhere in the country, as it has a "ripple effect" for the few aircrafts who fly domestic why there need to be some "rubber" time built in to the itinerary. The flights Ulaanbaatar to/from Ölgii is Thursdays and Saturdays. There are alternative airports within a days drive from Ölgii for all other days except Sundays.

**DATES ex Barnaul**  
**Daily May through October**

Reservations: