

There Is Nothing Like ... Siberia

Siberia, a vast region comprising the Asian portion of Russia as well as northern Kazakhstan. Siberia is a treasure trove of natural resources, with huge deposits of oil, gas, and minerals and vast stands of timber. Historically, the region was notorious as a bleak place of exile for Russian criminals, and, when the area was part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), for those considered opponents of the Communist regime.

Siberia is bounded on the west by the Ural Mountains; on the north by the Arctic Ocean; on the east by the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Strait; and on the south by China, Mongolia, and the hills of north central Kazakhstan. The name Siberia comes from the Tatar term Sibir, meaning 'sleeping land.'



Unique Nature

The region of Siberia spans 13,488,500 sq km (5,207,900 sq mi) and is even larger than Canada, which is the second largest country in the world after Russia. The region is divided into three major geographic areas. In the west, between the Ural Mountains and the Yenisey River, is the West Siberian Plain, which contains large amounts of swampland. Between the Yenisey and Lena rivers lies the Central Siberian Plateau, with elevations ranging between 300 and 1200m (1000 and 4000 ft). And to the east is a complex system of mountain ranges and uplands extending from the Lena River to the Pacific coast.

Siberia has several major mountain ranges. The mountain chain composed of the Yablonovyy and Stanovoy ranges extends from just north of the Mongolian border northeast to the Sea of Okhotsk. Also on the Mongolian border, south of the Central Siberian Plateau, are the Sayan Mountains.

The highest mountains in Siberia are generally in the Altay range, south of the West Siberian Plain. Spanning portions of Russia's borders with Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and China, the Altay Mountains generally measure between 3000 and 4000m (10,000 and 13,000 ft) in height, reaching their highest elevation at Mount Belukha (4,506 m/ 14,783 ft).

At Siberia's northeastern extreme, a chain of volcanic peaks—some of which are still active—extends along the entire length of the Kamchatka Peninsula. One volcano, Klyuchevskaya Sopka, is the tallest peak in Siberia at 4,750m (15,584 ft).

Siberia is traversed from north to south by three great rivers, whose tributaries intersect like branches of huge spreading trees. From west to east, these rivers are the Ob', the Yenisey, and the Lena, all of which flow north and drain into the Arctic Ocean. The three rivers are frozen from six to nine months of each year. Of Siberia's major rivers, only the Amur flows east, following a sharply winding course to the Pacific Ocean.



Southeast of the Central Siberian Plateau, near the Mongolian border, is Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake. Lake Baikal holds one-fifth of the earth's fresh surface water and contains a great diversity of plant and animal species, many of which cannot be found anywhere else on earth.

Except in the south, Siberia experiences long, cold winters that last for seven to eight months in most parts of the region and even longer in the far northeast. Summers in Siberia are short and generally moderate. The average temperature tends to rise as one moves south.

Siberia is rich in animal life. Among its more common mammals are foxes, otters, wolves, hare, moose, reindeer, polar and brown bears, sable, seals, and walruses. Leopards, tigers, and antelope inhabit the Amur River region. Sturgeon, salmon, and rare freshwater seals inhabit Lake Baikal.

Vast oil and gas deposits constitute Siberia's most valuable natural resources. The region also has huge reserves of mineral resources, most notably coal, gold, copper, and iron ore. Siberian mines have placed Russia, and before it the USSR, among the world's leading producers of gold.

Siberian Tourism

Tourism in Siberia is a perspective and rapidly developing branch. Year by year more and more people choose this region to spend their vacations. The diversity of firms, that render tourist service lead to the improvement of the quality of this service.

The Siberian tourism recently gains bigger popularity not only with the Russians, but also with the citizens of countries like England, Germany, Finland, and Czech Republic and so on. The active and extreme kinds of sport are the most attractive ones. The Siberian Rivers are a perfect place for hiking of different levels on all kind of rolling boats, ranging from kayaks and catamarans to rafts. Windsurfers and kitesurfers train and compete on Siberian lakes. Lake Baikal, the deepest lake in the world, has been chosen by divers from all the countries for unique beauty and peculiarity.

Mountain chains and ranges are of particular interest for tourists in any season. Those who are fond of

rock climbing, mountaineering and speleological tourism come there. In winter mountain sides become the place of pilgrimage for snowboarders and downhill skiers.

Moreover, cycling tourism becomes more and more widely spread. The competitions are being held; the participants usually come from other regions of the country.

Developing of the region makes it possible to raise the level of tourist comfort and security. Wide coverage of cellular communications, comfortable hotels, number of restaurants and snack-bars, museums, exhibitions, theatres and art galleries make a visit to Siberia unforgettable for everybody and more people get convinced of it coming there again and again.



Population

Overall, the region is sparsely inhabited, with the population concentrated mainly along the Trans-Siberian Railroad in southern Siberia, and in the southwest, where the climate is relatively mild. Most major cities lie along or near the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Siberia's harsh climate, poor roads, and limited food supplies kept the Russian population in the region small until 1861, when the Russian imperial government freed the country's serfs (peasants legally bound to the land they worked) and significant migration began. When construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad began in the early 1890s, hundreds of thousands of Russian settlers arrived in the region, and farming began to develop in Siberia on a commercial scale. Before this time, Russians living in the region had been mainly soldiers, government officials, runaway serfs, peasants, and religious dissidents.

Recent History

Today Siberia plays an important role in the Russian economy, although it still faces some of the problems that impeded its development in earlier times. The region's remoteness and harsh climate obstruct the exploitation of natural resources and make it a difficult environment for human existence. Perhaps the most serious problem facing Siberia today is its severe pollution, which is largely a result of the aggressive, careless ways in which the Soviet government pursued industrialization.

Facts about Siberia

2/3 of Russia's Territory

7 different time zones

Less than one inhabitant per square kilometer

The world's richest territory in natural resources

Photo: Flickr, TR archive

<http://encarta.msn.com>

<http://library.thinkquest.org/06aug/00723/tour.htm>

Date: 2009-02-23

Article link:

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