

Huge, Old, Beautiful Lake Surrounded by Wildness

Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest lake in the world recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (1996). Situated in the southern steppes of Siberia, the lake is surrounded by mountain chains that form sheer walls thousands of feet high.



Indigenous people call Lake Baikal the "Sacred Sea" in admiration of its majestic beauty and size. Blessed with ample biodiversity, the lake itself provides habitat for more than 1,500 plant and animal species found nowhere else on earth. In fact, the world's only freshwater seal lives here, in the amazingly clear water of Baikal.

The main towns in the area are Severobaikalsk, Babushkin, Selenginsk, Baikalsk, Sludyanka. The territory of these five urban centres are excluded from the World Heritage property.

Lake Baikal is much visited by local, national and international tourists. There are several camping and tourists bases on the Lake shore. The more inhabited southern and eastern parts are better developed in terms of facilities and infrastructure. The mountain ranges of the Eastern Sayans and Barguzin attract climbers. Irkutsk and Ulan Ude provide services and facilities for tourists and visitors.

Baikal holds twenty percent of the earth's fresh water and harbors more endemic species of plants and animals than any other lake in the world. Fed by 336 rivers and streams including the Angara, Barguzin, Selenga, Turka and Snezhnaya, the lake holds fifty species of fish including bullhead, sturgeon and omul.



The lake's surrounding wild mountains and rivers make the Lake Baikal region an ideal area for

engaging in an array of outdoor pursuits including hiking, climbing, whitewater sports, skiing and nature photography.

It has continental climate with profound fluctuations of both annual and daily temperatures. Mean daily temperatures range from -25 C in January to 18 C in July. However, Lake Baikal itself creates a microclimate within a 25km radius of its shores, distinct from the terrestrial part of the basin. Winter temperatures are less severe at -21 C , and summer temperatures are cooler (15 C). The surface of the Lake freezes during winter, with ice present until mid-June. The wind regime is comparable to those found in coastal areas: in winter, winds blow from the relatively cold land to the lake, and in summer, from the lake to the relatively warm land.



The lake, called "the Pearl of Siberia", drew investors from the tourist industry as energy revenues sparked an economic boom. Viktor Grigorov's Grand Baikal in Irkutsk is one of the investors, who planned to build three hotels creating 570 jobs. In 2007, the Russian government declared the Baikal region a special economic zone. The popular resort of Listvyanka is home to the seven-story Hotel Mayak. Rosatom plans to build a laboratory in Baikal, in conjunction with an international uranium plant and to invest \$2.5bn in the region and create 2,000 jobs in the city of Angarsk.

Lake Baikal

Baikal is located almost in the centre of Asia. Its length is 636 km, the greatest width between the Onguren peak and the Ust-Barguzin peak is 79,5 km; the length of the coastal line is nearly 2000 km. At 1,637 meters (5,370 ft), Lake Baikal is the **deepest lake in the world**, and the **largest freshwater lake** in the world by volume. There are 22 islands in the lake, the area of the biggest of them – Ol`khon – is more than 700 sq. km. Baikaltravel.ru

Interesting Facts

Lake Baikal is a unique phenomenon of our planet. Its fauna contains almost all the main types of fresh water animals of the world. The number of the Baikal species of endemic organisms is even bigger than in such distant and exotic lands as New Zealand, the Galapagos Islands, Madagascar and others. Lake

Baikal is also the biggest reservoir and factory of the highest quality clean fresh water. The lake contains about 1/5 of the world fresh water stock and more than 4/5 of Russia's stock. Every year about 60 cub. km of unique quality water is reproduced in Lake Baikal, and its meaning is growing continuously. The quality of the water is conditioned by the unique Baikal animal and plant world vital activity. The natural peculiarities of Lake Baikal are unique. Here, in the centre of Siberia, there are more sunny days a year than at the famous Black Sea resorts. The Baikal is one of the oldest lakes in the world. It is about 25 mln years old and there are no signs of its getting older. Lake Baikal has many features of an ocean: abyssal depths, a huge mass of water, inner waves, tides, strong storms, high waves, great values of magnetic anomalies etc. Baikal-center.ru

Photo: Flickr, TR archive

<http://www.gobaikal.com>

Date: 2009-02-23

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-huge-old-beautiful-lake-surrounded-by-wildness-article798>