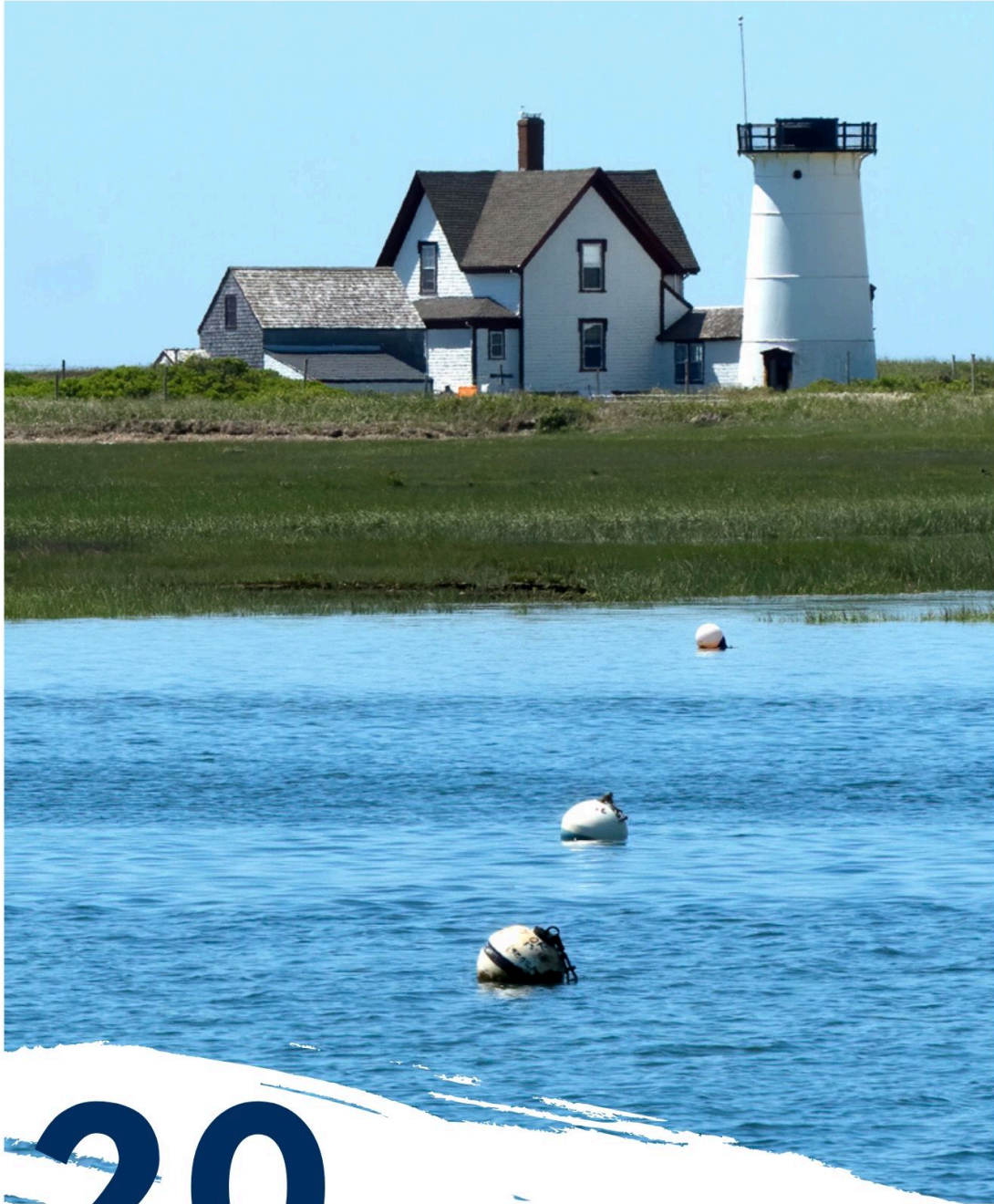

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Hitchhiker's Guide to the Altai Republic



By Victoria Krasyuuk

Victoria documented her six-day hitch hiking trip through the Altai Republic to exemplify her conviction that her photographs are a bridge connecting the viewer with her view of the world. She is a professional photographer working in California, USA, and St. Petersburg, Russia.



Central Asia is one of the oldest cultural areas of the world and is the most northern of the ancient civilizations. Fertile soils spread around the mountains and large rivers. Most of the territory, however, is nothing but desert. This is a powerful place: snowy peaks of the mountains, stormy rivers, endless valleys, cleanest lakes, and breathtaking landscapes.

People escape to this place from technology and the never-ending buzz of urban civilization to be alone with the nature. After all, the local way of life here has not changed for decades. Here, there are grazing herds of horses, people still believe in spirits, and a mobile signal appears quite rarely. The water in the streams is cleaner than in the tap - you can drink it with your hand. You can see the stars at night; you have only to raise your head.

On the border with Mongolia.



The village of Kosh Agach is located in the middle of the steppe. This is the driest and coldest place in Russia, but also the hottest and sunniest in the summer season. There is no vegetation on the streets which makes it feel like you are on another planet. The views are breathtaking; the most striking in this

valley is a flat surface and the five-kilometer peaks that are floating above it.

The North Chujsky ridge of Altai Mountains.

This is the first mountain range you see when entering from the Chui highway. Stretching almost 120 kilometers, it is home to the great glacier Aktru, which is a sanctuary of eternal snow and ice. One of Nature's wonders; majestic and powerful, but its appearance changes with snowfall.

The ridge hides within itself an amazing beauty of the lakes and glaciers. The most spectacular landscapes can be seen in the summer when the steppe is covered with greenery. At the distance, above the horizon, you can see white snow, but which seems to be close.

The Geysir lake.



At the foot of the mountain, deep into the woods, there is a lake. With sky-blue waters and bizarre patterns on the bottom. This lake is surrounded by high larch. This is an amazing place that nature created over the centuries. The lake is located near the Myony resort, which is next to the village of Aktash. Locals call this lake "Turquoise". It is not more than 30 meters in diameter, with a depth of three meters. There are active thermal springs at the center of the lake. The bottom of the lake features the most beautiful blue clay. Many lakes like this can be found within Yellowstone National Park of the United States.

The view beyond the horizon.



It is even more inspiring when you reach your goal. If mountains could be compared to a people, I would say that these mountains are like Vikings. Powerful and incredibly courageous — that is what these mountains seem to me.

Perhaps this is how boundaries are erased and everything that is unnecessary is discarded. The mountains determine who you are. Can you become a warrior, or will you give up? You play their game. You feel entirely different when you are in these mountains. To see the horizon line and endless open views, you have to climb up the hill which is located on the opposite side the lake.

A night in the wild.

You can camp at the top of the hill between the mountains. There is nothing around you but the sky, endless freedom, and all sounds of small native animals. When you travel as a hitchhiker, a night in the tent in the wild will be necessary at some point. This experience will reward you with new discoveries and new sensations. You will understand why many travelers camp in tents along the way. To choose the right place, you need only to look around.

The House of Gods.



Mount Beluha is the highest point in the Altai Republic region. It is one of the tallest mountain peaks in Russia rising 4,509 meters. This majestic monument of nature is called the shrine of the Altai mountains. It is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The climbers say Beluha is not for breaking records but for pleasures of the soul. At the foot of this mountain, there is an amazing atmosphere of openness, friendship, and brotherhood. Local residents respect it and consider it sacred. People believe that Beluha is an antenna that receives information from Space and distributes it to the whole Earth.

Beluha has its own special character and is not afraid to show it. It might meet you with a friendly hello or might not let you near itself hiding behind torrential rains and low - hanging clouds. Once you experience both the top and the foot of the mountain, you begin

to feel like you are part of the nature and nature is a part of you. You begin to wish that people care for it as they care about themselves.

Road M-52.



Roads are what connects us together. They call for adventure. They remind us that no matter what happens, we can always move forward. The road M-52 is one of the five most beautiful roads in the world according to National Geographic magazine.

Landscapes change from lunar valleys to water basins; from the vast steppes to the grand mountains rising up in front of your eyes. The Chui highway goes through the valleys of seven rivers between ten mountain ranges and through and across two high-mountain steppes. It covers a distance of 953 km.

It is the first fully functioning road connecting Russia and China. Thus, beginning your road journey in Siberia, you can rush to the Indian Ocean. In total, my journey covered 1,694 km through the territory of the Altai Republic.