



RUSSIA

**MAGICAL
OLKHON**

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Khuzhir, Olkhon Island. A dancer rehearses before a show.

- ▶ Olkhon Island is situated along the northern shore of Lake Baikal, in Russia
- ▶ It is the world's third largest lake-bound island and covers an area of 730 square kilometres
- ▶ The first to discover the island was the Cosack explorer Kurbat Ivanov in 1643
- ▶ Inhabited since Neolithic times, numerous locations on the island are sacred shamanic sites
- ▶ The island's 1500 inhabitants live a simple life, mainly centred around fishing and rearing livestock, although a fledgling tourism industry is starting to develop



Lake Baikal. Sunset at Shaman's Rock.



Khuzhir, Olkhon Island. The theatre.



Alexei Kopylov, a former soldier in the Red army, stands in his yard proudly showing all of his medals.

They call it Olkhon but also Ojchon or Oljòn. Mapped for the first time in the middle of the 17th century by intrepid Cosack explorer, Kurbat Ivanov, it is an enchanting island in the heart of Lake Bajkal. This part of Russia is home to the Buryat culture, whose religious and cultural practices are shamanic, their faith is populated by divinities that live in nature – in a cave, in the rock, in the desert. And in ice, the indispensable natural bridge that forms for two months each year and is capable of supporting both humans and heavy vehicles, therefore, an element that has always been seen as a source of unification rather than division.

Seven villages are located along the island's seventy-kilometre length; together they have a total population of just 1500, most of whom rely on fishing, rearing animals and farming for their livelihoods. "Their solitude," explains photographer Alessandro Scattolini, "is punctuated by a slow pace of life and an isolation that leads necessarily to simplicity: a warm and welcoming home, a reconstructed theatre, a swing for children, a leather item of clothing, a wooden fence. In fact, on the island, animals live in freedom and the humans demarcate a corner of the world for themselves by building fences that enable them to live in safety."



Olkhon Island. View of the eastern shore of Lake Baikal.



Khuzhir. Orthodox priest Vasily Mahow celebrates mass.



Lake Baikal. Horses run free in the north of the island.



Khuzhir. Students during a lesson.



Khuzhir. Inside a house.



Lake Baikal. Alik Pogosyan fishes in the lake.



The hands of Zinaida Caplena.



The main road that crosses the island.



The northern part of Olkhon Island. Piotr Holutov cuts meat in a barn on his farm.



Lake Baikal, the northern part of Olkhon Island. In the winter the low temperature and winds, that can reach speeds of 150 knots, freeze the surface of the lake.



Lake Baikal. The southern coast of the island.



A home on the edge of the woods to the north of Khuzhir.



Lake Baikal. Alik Pogosyan fishes in the lake.



A decorative detail inside an islander's home.



A member of staff at the library and historical archive in Khuzhir.



In the woods on Olkhon Island. Hell, one of Igor's dogs, is a cross between a wolf and a Husky.



Khuzhir. A pianist practices.



A mother takes a walk on Lake Baikal on a beautiful winter's day.



Guennadiy Milovanov tends to his beloved cacti.



Khuzhir. Young people dressed in traditional costume during the people's festival.



Alik Pogosyan on his way to go fishing.



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