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Kamchatka Brownbears, Kambalnoy Lake, 2021

Trip 1 Juli 12 – 22, 2021
Trip 2 July 18 – 28, 2021

Trip description: Kambalnoy lake & river within the South Kamchatka Sanctuary are located at the southern tip of the Kamchatka peninsula. It is one of the last huge and vast wilderness regions on this once wild earth. Here not us humans dictate the law of the land. Instead we follow the laws of nature and we will especially yield to the bears as the kings of these eco systems.

This lake & river system, situated at the base of the still active Kambalnoy volcano, is the same where Charlie Russell (BBC film: Bear man of Kamchatka) and I rehabilitated and reintroduced five orphaned brown bear cubs in 2004. The film “Die Suche nach Sky”(2011), produced by SF TV, documents this project, including my return to this place in 2010 in an attempt to relocate some of the released orphans of 2004.

To be able to visit this place is an absolute privilege. Only a small handful of people so far have been awarded this opportunity. It is a jewel of wildness, untouched beauty and of peaceful calmness. No other place on earth has allowed me this deep insight into what it must have been like on the entire planet long ago.

While on all of my trips we will concentrate on interconnectedness of all things in an eco-system, the Kamchatka brown bears are clearly the focus of this trip.

Accommodation: Rustic river cabins with bunk style beds and mattresses. Separate dining cabin. Viewing platform with benches and roof in case of rain above the river.

Group size: Max. 8 peoples End Registration: End of January 2021, on a first come – first serve basis

Cost: Gruppe of 8, per person \$5'990 US
 Gruppe of 7, per person \$6'290 US

Included: Helicopter flights, Guide, Cook, Translator, Park inspector, all meals, Visa Invite & Voucher, Park fees, Insurance, Accommodation B&B, Transportation in Yelizovo and PK, Rent of all needed gear (Electric fence, Tents, Generator, Satellite phone, etc.), dinner day 1.

Not Included: Your flight to and from Russia. Potential excursions during the two buffer days.

Note: Eventhough it's not expected, trip costs could still slightly change, because of the unstable political situation in Russia.

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Day to Day

Day 1

Arrival at the latest on the morning of this day, better yet the day before. Transfer from the airport to the B&B in Yelizovo, a suburb of Petropavlovsk (PK). Dinner and overnight.

Day 2 – 7

It is an unforgettable 60 minute flight in a steady MI-8 helicopter, over untouched wilderness, past steaming volcanos and rivers and meadows teaming with life and with Kamchatka brown bears.

Depending on where the bears will be (which again depends on salmon runs), we will have the choice of staying either at the river or by the lake. Likely we'll do both during our days with the bears here. Both places are fantastic and this option simply gives us more flexibility to be where most action takes place.

After arriving all the gear will have to be carried to the cabin, at which point we'll move into our accommodations for the next few days. Soon our Russian chef will start preparing delicious foods so that our cozy cabin will become even cozier with the smell of her delicious creations. Soon after arriving I and our Russian inspector will provide you with an introduction to this place, its bears and our behavior in the presence of these great animals. This will also include a safety talk. And if there's enough time we will take a first stroll or simply watch the first bears from the porch of the cabin.

For the next few days we will explore this natural paradise on daily excursions. We will move without exception on a network of ancient bear trails created by the pads of hundreds of bears over the past few centuries. There are various options for such daily walks. We can either descend the Kambalnoy river which flows out of the lake and down towards the Sea of Okhotsk. About 4km from the cabin there is a series of falls where the large male bears migrate to in order to gorge themselves on salmon when they move upstream.

Depending on weather and shape of the group members, it is also possible to climb one of the small peaks in the area. From various points high up we will be able to see both coastlines of the peninsula and if we're lucky we'll even spot one or two of the Kuril islands south towards Japan. These higher slopes are often during summer months covered with blueberries. If that's the case then we'll have the opportunity to stuff ourselves together with the bears with handfuls of delicious blueberries.

Because of climate change related impacts, salmon runs are not as predictable as they once were. Most likely however, we'll be able to observe and photograph the fascinating spectacle of bears chasing and feeding on fish.

It is one of the most beautiful places I have ever laid eyes on and with bears here being numerous it adds that certain pulse that makes a landscape become vibrant and alive.

In 2004 I spent an entire summer here with Charlie Russell. Together we reintroduced five orphaned brown bear cubs, including Sky and Buck, which are now just becoming adults. We may have a chance to see them on this trip. On the following link you can order a copy of the BBC film "Bear man of Kamchatka" which is the story of Charlie's work there. It would provide you with a great look at what Kambalnoy Lake looks like.

Day 8

We will break camp on the morning of this last day, so that we're ready when the helicopter arrives for the journey back to the city. The programmes here in Kamchatka are very much weather depended, that's why we must stay flexible and prepared for changes in the programme. More about this under "Important details". Once back in Yelizovo we will move back into the B&B and enjoy a dinner together.

Days 9 & 10

Both of these two days are reserve days in case of weather delays. Options for the two days include visiting hot springs, a city tour through Petropavlovsk, a boat tour on Avacha Bay. A document including all options will be sent out to you after a reservation.

Day 11

The end of the tour is on the morning of day 11.

Important details

1. Only a handful of people have ever laid eyes on this place. It is a place where bears are king and not us humans. Many of the bear trails on which we will be walking seldom see human boots. I see a visit here in this stunning, intact landscape as an absolute privilege. With this privilege there comes a responsibility for all of us to limit our impacts on plants and animals to an absolute minimum. I therefore ask everyone to respect this simple fact and to follow the instructions of myself and of the local authorities.
2. This trip could be considered a pioneering excursion. As a result of weather conditions it is possible that there will be program changes on short notice or flight delays. The local conditions demand a certain amount of flexibility. Infrastructure is little developed here and motor vehicles, accommodations will not always conform to European standards. Accommodations at the B&B are twin or double rooms, with shared bathrooms. It is therefore expected that you can relinquish certain comforts you may be used to.
3. Eventhough it's not expected, it's possible that due to unforseen weather patterns we will utilize more helicopter time then what we budgeted for. In that case extra flight time would be paid for by the group. However, this has not been the case in any previous trips I guided in Kamchatka.

Flights

A return economy flight from Zürich through Moscow to Petropavlovsk should cost no more then 1600 CHF. Aeroflot usually has the best rates. I can recommend the following Russian travel agency:

Intracom Reisebüro
Waffenplatz 51
8002 Zürich
Tel: 044 280 37 25

When traveling from North America, Air Russia offers the only flights across the Bering Straight, leaving from Anchorage, Alaska:

<https://airrussia.us>

If these flights from Anchorage to Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka are not operating, you may have to fly via Seoul, Tokyo and/or Vladivostok.

Equipment

Kamchatka is known for its rough climate. On the other hand temperatures can also soar for days to 30 C. This means that when packing you must be prepared for both, cold and wet and hot and dry weather. Having proper shoe wear is always important and on this trip hip waders are a must. You may also bring your hiking boots. After registration we will send you a complete gear list.

Insurance

It is advisable to buy a trip/flight cancellation insurance. Due to the potential of weather delays the possibility exists that you may miss your flight home. That is extremely rare and for this reason we have buffer days planned into the IT. But better save then sorry!

Photography

A small generator will be available in order to charge batteries and other gadgets.

Mosquitoes

The Russian tundra and taiga is notorious for insects and particularly moscitos. Fortunately though there is often a strong breeze blowing either off the Sea of Okhotsk or the North Pacific so that the little buggers stay put. On calm days however long sleeves and mosquito repellent is advisable. In past years bugs have not been a mig issue.

Add-on Program

If you already travel this far you may want to send more then ten days on Kamchatka. It may be a good idea to add a few days to your itinerary before our trip so you can get acquainted with the place and get over the jet leg. You may also add days at the end of our trip together. Either way we can help you find additional destinations and experiences to help you make the best of your trip.

In case of weather related dellays, we have included two reserve days in this budget. At the moment no activities are planed on either one of those two days. Any additional planned activities would be an added cost.