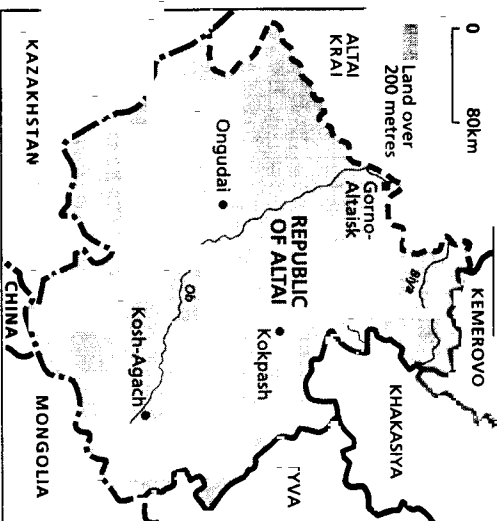


# Altai

## (REPUBLIC OF ALTAI)



The Republic of Altai is situated in the Altai Mountains, in the basin of the Ob river. The Republic forms the eastern part of the Altai Krai and belongs to the Western Siberian Economic Area. It has international borders with Kazakhstan in the south-west, a short border with the People's Republic of China to the south, and with Mongolia to the south-east. Kemerovo Oblast lies to the north, the Republics of Khakassiya and Tyva to the east. The Republic is mountainous (Belukha, at 4,506 m or 14,783 feet, is the highest peak in Siberia) and heavily forested (about one-quarter of its territory). Its major rivers are the Kayyn and the Biya and it has one lake, Teletskoye. It contains one of Russia's major national Parks, Altai State National Park (35,750 sq miles) and comprises 10 administrative districts and one city. Its climate is continental, with short summers and long, cold winters. At 1 January 1996 it was estimated to have a population of 202,000 and a population density, therefore, of only 2.2 per sq km. Only 14.2% of its inhabitants resided in urban areas at this time. The census of 1989 put the number of Russians at some 60% of the total and of ethnic Altai at 31%. Some 6.0% of the population were Kazakh, 0.9% Ukrainian and 0.4% German at this time. The Altai people can be divided into two distinct groups: the Northern Altai, or Chernemye Tatars, consisting of the Tubalars, the Chelkans or Leberdin and the Kumandins; and the Southern Altai, comprising the Altai Kizhi, the Telengit, the Telesy and the Telcut.

The language spoken by both groups is from the Turkish branch of the Uralo-Altaic family: that of the Northern Altai is from the Old Uigur group, while the language of the Southern Altai is close to the Kyrgyz language and is part of

the Kipchak group. Over 84% of Altaiis speak one or other language as their native tongue, and some 62% of the Altai population is fluent in Russian. Although the traditional religion of the Altai was animist, many were converted to Christianity, so the dominant religion in the Republic is Russian Orthodoxy. The Republic's administrative centre is at Gorno-Altaiisk, which had an estimated population of 48,300 at 1 January 1996.

### History

From the 11th century the Altai peoples inhabited Dzungaria (Sungaria—now mainly in the north-west of the People's Republic of China). The region was under Mongol control until 1389, when it was conquered by the Tatar forces of Tamerlane (Tamberlane or Timur 'the Lame'); it subsequently became a Kalmyk confederation. In the first half of the 18th century many Altaiis moved westwards, invading Kazakhstan territory and progressing almost as far as the Urals. In 1758, however, most of Dzungaria was incorporated into Xinjiang (Sinkiang), a province of the Chinese Empire. China embarked on a war aimed at exterminating the Altai peoples. Only a few thousand survived, finding refuge in the Altai Mountains. In the 19th century Russia began to assert its control over the region and the Altai territory was finally annexed in 1866. In the early 1900s Burkhanism or White Faith, a strong nationalist religious movement, emerged. The movement was led by Oiroi Khan, who claimed to be a descendant of Chinghiz (Genghis) Khan and promised to liberate the Altaiis from Russian control. However, in February 1918 it was a secular nationalist leader, B. I. Anuchin, who convened a Constituent Congress of the High Altai and demanded the establishment of an Oiroi Republic—to include the Altai, the Khakassians and the Tyvans. In partial recognition of such demands, on 1 July 1922 the Soviet Government established an Oiroi Autonomous Oblast in Altai Krai. Nationalist feeling remained strong in the region, however, and in 1933 many members of the local Communist Party were purged. On 7 January 1948 the region was renamed the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Oblast, in an effort to suppress nationalist sentiment.

In the late 1980s nationalism re-emerged in response to Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness). As was frequently the case in the last years of the Communist order, such opposition was expressed over issues of local environmental concern and the Soviet Government was forced to abandon plans to construct a hydroelectric dam on the Autonomous Oblast's territory. Renamed Altai, the region became an autonomous republic at the signing of the Russian Federation Treaty in March 1992. It had adopted its State Sovereignty Declaration on 25 October 1990. A resolution adopted on 14 October 1993 provided for the establishment of a State Assembly (El Kurultai), which comprised 27 deputies and represented the highest body of power in the Republic. In mid-1998 an escalating financial crisis in the Republic resulted in a degree of political unrest. Following the blockade by around 1,000 public-sector workers of the State Assembly building, in protest at payment arrears, the legislature adopted an appeal to the federal authorities for urgent financial aid.

### Economy

The Republic of Altai is predominantly an agricultural region. Its gross region product amounted to 906,100m. roubles in 1995, or 5,526,800 roubles per hea

The main industrial centre in the Republic is at its capital, Gorno-Altaiisk. Owing to its mountainous terrain it contains just 6,000 km (3,730 miles) of roads, of which 572 km comprise a section of the major Novorossiisk-Biisk-Tashanta highway. In March 1996 the Russian Government allocated some 1,800m. roubles to alleviate the effects in the Republic of the nuclear tests conducted at Semipalatinsk (Kazakhstan) during the Soviet period.

Agriculture in the Republic of Altai, which employed 28.9% of the working population in 1995, consists mainly of livestock breeding (largely horses, deer, sheep and goats, amounting to 81% of agricultural activity), bee-keeping, grain production and hunting. The export of the antlers of Siberian maral and sika deer, primarily to South-East Asia, is an important source of convertible ('hard') currency to the Republic. The territory is also one of Russia's leading cheese producers. The total value of agricultural output in 1995 was 462,600m. roubles. The Republic's mountainous terrain often prevents the easy extraction or transport of minerals, but there are important reserves of manganese, iron, silver, lead and wolfram (tungsten), as well as timber. Stone, lime, salt, sandstone, gold, mercury and non-ferrous metals are also produced. There are food-processing, light, chemical, metal-working and machine-tool industries, as well as factories assembling tractors, automobiles, radios, televisions, engines, boilers and electrical appliances. Industry employed just 9.4% of the working population in 1995, while the value of industrial production amounted to 142,000m. roubles. In the mid-1990s the value of the Republic's exports (approximately one-half of which were antlers) averaged around US \$11m. per year, while its imports were equivalent to around \$3m.

In 1995 a total of 80,900 of the Republic's inhabitants were economically active, of whom 1,900 were registered unemployed. The average monthly wage in that year was 316,000 roubles. The territory suffered severe financial difficulties during 1998—in July of that year overall arrears in salaries, child benefit and other budgetary payments was estimated to be in excess of 183m. new roubles (i.e. 183,000m. in terms of pre-1998 roubles). At the end of that year the Republic was cited as the territory furthest behind in wage arrears after the Chukchi and Koryak AOKs, and the situation provoked industrial action by teachers in January 1999. A budgetary surplus of 3,700m. roubles had been achieved in 1995, although foreign investment in that year amounted to just US \$5,000. At 1 January 1996 there were approximately 1,500 small businesses operating in the Republic.

## Directory

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