Winter is a quintessential Mongolian season. It is cold, very cold, but the cold is an important part of what makes Mongolia and its landscapes extraordinary at this time of year. For all of our winter trips, we provide traditional felt boots, hand-made goat skin blankets and can provide winter deels as well. You’ll spend most nights in a ger - warming yourself by the stove. The night skies more than make up for the challenge of the temperatures. Winter in Mongolia is a remarkable experience - especially as the Mongolians you meet will be very proud to welcome foreign visitors in wintertime.
Our Orkhon Valley In Brief

The Orkhon River Valley is one of Mongolia’s four World Heritage Sites. It’s a cultural WHS and represents the evolution of nomadic pastoral traditions in Mongolia. Usually included in general tour itineraries, it is a stunning area to explore in its own right - especially in the winter months.

You’ll explore this region of nomadic traditions and culture on three separate one-day treks. It’s about observing the way in which the people you meet live - all within a background of diverse wild and beautiful winter landscapes.
Your Itinerary Overview

All images used throughout this document were taken either by EL guests or members of the EL team. This is the Mongolia that you will also experience.

Ulaan Baatar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day One - final arrival day into UB</th>
<th>City Walking Tour</th>
<th>Your own choice of accommodation</th>
<th>Free transfer</th>
<th>Local Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* In March, the city can still be affected by pollution. We take this into consideration on this city walking tour</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

UB is home to roughly 45% of Mongolia’s population and spending time on our informal and relaxed city walking tour will give you a contrasting insight into a way of life, compared to that of the rural population. This day is not about museums or shopping – it’s about getting out and about and exploring and discovering.

Central Heartland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day Two</th>
<th>Khogno Khan Nature Reserve</th>
<th>Basic but private ger at small family (Davaasuren) operated ger camp (5-6 gers). Asian style outside long drop toilet. No showers.</th>
<th>285 km on dirt road (approx 6 hours driving time not including stops)</th>
<th>LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* At Khogno Khan, we work with the Davaasuren family who have lived in the region their whole life. Due to their age, they are no longer nomadic but do keep a small number of livestock - including horses. Over the years, they have become accustomed to western visitors - they are a quiet couple and keep themselves to themselves.. They are located in an idyllic spot at the foot of the Elsen Tasarkhai sand dunes where they live all year round.</td>
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</table>

Sacred granite mountain home to a community of nomadic herders.

Explore the hidden interiors of the mountain on an easy 3-hour hike to the small working temple of Erdene Khambiin Khid and the ruined Ovgon Khiid Monastery. A birch bordered path leads to this location and offers one of the most beautiful panoramas of the region.

If you’re feeling brave, wrap up warm and explore the dune landscapes on a camel trek with Davaasuren. Davaasuren is at his happiest on showing off his home landscapes of Khogno Khan. He’s a bit of an entertainer as well and his camel / horse treks can include sand sculpting, impromptu wrestling matches and singing.
Ulaan Tsutgalan - Orkhon Waterfall

The area surrounding Ulaan Tsutgalan was created by a series of volcanic eruptions (there are often different types of igneous rock lying on the surface – such as basalt and pumice stone which solidified from molten Magma after reaching the surface). The 20-meter high waterfall is spectacularly frozen and formed by a series of small streams and rivers including the Ulaan Gol. Here you will do two separate horse treks - one will be closer to home - trekking ‘ger to ger’ and experiencing the way of life for this community of herders. The second will go further afield, exploring the volcanic landscapes or frozen rivers.

Basic but private ger at small family operated ger camp with 3-4 gers. Basic long drop outside toilet and no showers.

- Hot shower should be available at local town shower house en-route - your own private cubicle and plenty of hot water

* For your stay at Ulaan Tsutgalan, you will stay at the small tourist ger camp of owned by Tomorbat and his family. They are retired herders but their son and son-in-law are still herders and they milk their yak herds in the early morning which you can partake in.

This region is famous in Mongolia for the hand production and traditional decoration of gers. Although the family do not speak English and keep to themselves, they are very kindly hosts. At some point you should ask to visit their home ger - hand made, carved, decorated and painted by Tomorbat.

Roughly 215km on asphalt and dirt road (approximately 5-6 hours driving time not including stops and depending on road and weather conditions).

Orkhon River Valley and Kharkhorin

Spend the day exploring the Orkhon River Valley. It's a cultural UNESCO World Heritage Site and represents the evolution of nomadic pastoral traditions in Mongolia.

You'll visit Kharkhorin - the ancient capital of Ogodei Khan and the Mongol Empire in the 13th Century. You'll also explore Erdene Zuu - Mongolia’s oldest monastery and visit the excellent Kharkhorin Museum with its clear and updated exhibits based on the history surrounding the Orkhon River Valley and the Turkish and Mongol Empire. Even if history doesn’t really 'grab' you, we recommend a visit as it helps to bring the history of the area alive.

Private ger at small ger camp business. This is owned by Gaya - her husband died and she set up this business to provide an income for her family. She’s a wonderful inspirational woman. Outside long drop toilet. Hot shower available at the local town shower house.

130km on dirt road (approx 4 hours driving time not including stops)
| Day Seven |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Return to Ulaanbaatar** | We'll transfer you to your accommodation in UB and the rest of the day will be yours to create your own experience. Remember you could use our UB guide to help you to explore the urban side of Mongolian life in downtown Ulaan Baatar. Alternatively, one of our trip assistants could be made available but please let me know in advance | **Accommodation of your choice in UB** | **355km on dirt road (approx 6-7 hours driving time not including stops)** |
|  |  |  | B/L |
Map Of Route

Alternatively, use our interactive map

Pricing And Group Size

Group Size - Flexible. Children under 15 travel for free. Those between 15-18 years of age for 50% of the price.

- 2 Guests        US$ 1185 pp
- 3-4 Guests      US$ 955 pp
- 5 Guests        US$ 865 pp
- 6 Guests        US$ 790 pp

The above prices include a 15% discount pp as a thank you for choosing to travel with EL outside of the main season.

Exclusions

Please be aware that my trip pricing excludes the price of accommodation in UB though. Why? Everyone is different is the standard of accommodation they prefer at the start and end of a trip. As there is now such a variety of hotels in UB it is easier to exclude this cost. I provide a list of ideas covering varying standards and budgets and I can also help with booking. There's everything from a homestay through to Airbnb, US$10 guesthouses and the Shangri-La!
Mongolia is a challenging country and offers a tough experience at any time of year - from its lack of infrastructure to its climate. Winter trips can sometimes be susceptible to unforeseen problems which might result in last minute itinerary changes. Things will not happen on a perfect schedule and conditions will be very rugged - you will be required to step outside your circle of comfort. Please base your expectations on this important point.

You will be expected to be flexible and patient and bring with you your willingness to participate and your sense of adventure and humour.

However, winter in Mongolia is stunning. Truly stunning. Just bring thermals!

Driving

On the road, there can be ice or hard-packed snow and winter storms create white-out driving conditions. However, our drivers are not just summer tourist drivers and drive all year round. Also remember that sunrise is not until around 0830 and sunset can be as early as 1630 so this will also impact on the day.

Weather

Although the temperatures can scare at first sight, it is a very dry cold and with good clothes -25 °C in Mongolia could be compared with - 5 °C in Europe. However, the concept of cold is very subjective! We need you to be responsible for yourself. Bring the correct clothing (I have a suggested packing list. I also provide details on the expected average temperatures). If you’re cold let your EL team know - do not try to put a brave face on it. It is not a competition to see who is the strongest - remember your EL team and the Mongolians you will meet are used to the winter weather conditions. You may not be.

Accommodation

Facilities will be more limited than you have maybe experienced on previous winter trips elsewhere. Apart from in the towns, your accommodation will be in family provided ger accommodation where there won’t be hot showers and the toilets will be OUTSIDE Asian style long drops. The ger will be insulated for winter with extra layers of felt as well as a lit-stove but you’re probably used to an insulated house with central heating. There is a substantial difference.

Travelling in the winter in Mongolia is as much about experiencing the landscapes and meeting and spending the time with the locals rather than hard-core adrenaline activities. Instead of competing with other travellers to see who can have the most ‘authentic’ or ‘challenging’ experience in the furthest, highest, remotest, or the most off the beaten track location just come and enjoy being part of a minority who visit Mongolia in the winter and enjoy slowing-down and seeing and experiencing Mongolia like few other people get to do.
I provide detailed Pre Departure Guidelines but this is your ‘quick (ish) glance’ introduction to the EL travel style.

Why this section? I’m not greedy. EL is not a general travel agency and we don’t want to be all things to all people. We are an independent micro business driven by the philosophy to support local so that our style of trip is beneficial to all. We use no outside agencies.

We are not perfect. We are just ordinary people trying our best to do something we love. We are not an ever-expanding group of travel professionals. We make mistakes. But we genuinely know and love Mongolia and are willing and eager to learn, develop and strengthen based on feedback from our guests and from all we work with. If it helps, we get repeat custom.

Female Mongolian trip assistant

I am lucky enough to be in a position to run my own business and, as a female, it is important to me to use my skills and influence to improve the prospects for other women. However, we don’t source the best guides that work the tourism circuit and that already have guaranteed work with other companies. Part of my business philosophy is to provide training and development opportunities to Mongolian women so instead, we provide opportunities to those that other companies won’t take as they don’t fit the stereotype or have the professional qualifications.

My ‘girls’ are dynamic young Mongolian women who are searching for an opportunity to train and develop - they’re the future of Mongolia. Or, as some of them are teachers and lecturers, they’re inspiring the future of Mongolia. If you want to discuss Mongolia’s economic policy then we’re probably not for you. But, if you want to spend time with someone who sincerely loves their home country, loves their job and genuinely care about you as our guests they we are for you. Yes, it may get frustrating for you at times but everyone needs to start somewhere and I’m proud to be able to provide that starting block.

Male Mongolian Driver

I employ eight drivers. I know each one personally. They are not necessarily modern city men - they are of the traditional ‘strong and silent’ type. If you take the time to get to know them, you’ll see why I employ them.

As well as handling the challenges of the Mongolian roads and making delicious Mongolian barbecues, they are supremely talented at the Mongolian skill of ‘mongolchlokh’ - improvising the Mongol way. It’s a joy to watch so if your vehicle does break down, don’t get angry. Instead, watch the drivers do what they do best - improvisation.

Yes, their English is limited but their role is to handle the Mongolian roads and not to converse fluently in a multitude of languages. They are great, all-round men.
The Russian UAZ / Furgon

It has a high wheel-base, ample luggage space, a sociable layout with forward and backward facing seats, surround side windows and most importantly, impressive off-road capability.

As is typical with all Furgons, due to the design of the vehicle, seat-belts are not available but our Furgons are fitted with grab handles in the passenger area.

Each EL vehicle has its own simple mobile kitchen, its own sunshade (not always needed in the winter!), a small library as well as a 220v inverter/charger. It also has an excellent winter heater.

We only put a maximum of three to four EL guests per vehicle.

Ger Accommodation

As much as possible we use family operated ger camps. Rural families frequently offer accommodation as a way of supplementing their income and providing extra financial security for themselves.

The circumstances and type of ger accommodation provided will change from family to family. Consider them as small rural businesses NOT rustic homestays. Some accommodation is offered by herders (maybe one separate ger), some is offered by ‘retired’ herders who no longer migrate (two to four separate gers), some by families that live in small town communities and some by families that own small ger camp businesses (mini ger camps of between 7 to 10 gers). On a couple of itineraries it may also involve sleeping on the floor of the family ger on a mat (such as in western Mongolia).

• Be prepared for a variety of standards. Please remember that this is someone’s way of life and home and that they provide what they can in relation to their circumstances.

• Most will have one Asian style long-drop/squat toilet which is shared by all. No families have access to running water from a tap so throughout our trips, we make stops at the local town shower houses - your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water.

• Beds will vary in comfort - most rural family members still traditionally sleep on the floor so don’t really understand the concept of double memory foam mattresses! The long drop toilets are not there to disgust you - this is what they use daily.

• You should have your own private ger either to share as an EL group (small group trip) or on your own (tailor made trip) but we don’t offer exclusivity as this limits the income of the families. However, in the winter months you will more than likely be on your own,

Local Hotels

In the winter months, nearly all ‘tourist’ accommodation shuts down. That leaves us with family provided accommodation and local hotels.

We don’t use hotels in all winter itineraries - each one is different. Where we do use a hotel, it is locally owned - built for the passing Mongolian trade rather than for western visitors so they have been built with the local population in mind so they are not corporate chains. However, one or two will pleasantly surprise you.

Why do we do this? It brings money and support into the local communities. As well as staying at the hotel we eat in local restaurants and buy our tour produce from the local market so you get a more real insight into the way of life for the locality.
Meals

Each of our vehicles has a simple portable kitchen as it offers you more freedom and flexibility as we’re not reliant on anyone else to provide meals. It also means we can have picnic lunches en-route so as we prepare them you can be exploring the local landscapes or sitting and taking in the view.

But, it’s not the same as a modern well-equipped kitchen. Also, it’s I and the trip assistants that prepare your meals and we’re not professional chefs.

We buy as much fresh produce as possible but fresh fruit is not available daily. Please remember where you are and that there will be limitations as to what we can provide.

The meals we provide for you will not be a fusion of modern Asian-Western cuisine as promised by other companies cooked up by a private chef. We frequently include the families we work with in our meals and so cook to please all including the EL drivers who are traditional Mongolian men. I believe that getting a real ‘taste’ for Mongolia means sampling the local cuisine (see below for those with dietary requirements- don’t panic!). This means you won’t be getting bacon sandwiches or Thai curries or paella or Chinese stir fry. We just provide honest, heartening grub.

Interaction / Meeting The Locals

None of the Mongolians we work with are tourism professionals. Mongolians can be warm and welcoming and they can also be taciturn, reserved and very very indifferent. We do not try to change Mongolians or their way of life for our/your own benefit or comfort. We don’t ask them to change their daily schedule or to put on an ‘act’.

However, travelling in the low season often means that the families you will come into contact with have more time to spend with our guests as their work is brought much closer to the ger.

However, as in our everyday lives, sometimes plans change and a family has to go to UB (for a medical reason etc). We never ask a family to change their daily living for us.

Yes, there will be tasks in which you can participate. But, you need to be proactive. Offer your time and help. Nothing is planned in any program, because we do not disturb the rhythm of life of the working families visited. We are just trying to share / experience a portion of their life.

Winter Horse / Camel Trekking

You will be accompanied by your EL trip assistant and the trek guide (typically the herder we work with who is the owner of the horses). This is not a fast-paced gallop but a slow-paced exploration of the landscapes and way of life. For the full-day rides, we may do two shorter explorations either side of lunch back at the ger accommodation although sometimes the driver may bring lunch in the vehicle and you’ll stop at the home of a local family. The precise route depends on the weather and we always keep your safety first.
Mongolia is frequently depicted as a pristine untouched wilderness where the traditional nomadic way of life still remains. Well, it is. And it isn’t. Our trips focus on 21st Century Mongolia - we try to provide a ‘realistic’ overview rather than that portrayed by guidebooks and other tour companies. To just want to experience the life of the traditional nomadic way of life is to ignore a majority of the population.

Mongolians are not just divided between those who live in Ulaanbaatar and nomads. It’s not just about the minority groups of the Kazakhs or the Tsaatan either. Mongolians live in the cities of Darkhan and Erdenet. They also live in the other provincial centres as well as the smaller town and rural communities. There are teachers and Christians and those with disabilities and policemen and musicians and military personnel and accountants and miners and geologists and drivers and shop owners and construction workers and street cleaners - they are all Mongolians.

Mongolia’s herders are under a lot of pressure. Yes, you want to experience their way of life but for them, their most important focus is looking after their livestock. The guidebooks mention the traditional hospitality of Mongolia’s nomads, but they don’t mention their daily workload and how this often means there is not time to welcome visiting guests with tea. Don’t travel to Mongolia expecting to sit each evening discussing with your hosts about their way of life as nomads. It just won’t happen.

So, what do you do? Ditch your expectations based on what you’ve read and watched. Instead come with an open mind and be challenged and surprised. The landscapes are immense and weathered and stark and remarkable. But you will be shocked by the amount of rubbish. Yes, there is still a nomadic way of life. But herdsmen have smartphones. The traditional culture still remains. But the literacy rate hovers around 97% (yes, 97%) and there is a drive for modernity and progress.

But it is a country that will impact on you greatly. Of that there is no doubt.
There’s a hunger for knowledge, understanding, and excellence that drives Mongolian society, and things are changing quickly, but remember that a lot of major changes have happened within just a couple generations. Be patient with Mongolia. While it works through the changes that are going to make it better place, savour the gifts it offers and try to spend less time worrying about small issues that aren’t being met - such as hot showers or lack of western toilets. Remember, Mongolians are living this life everyday through all seasons not just for a few weeks.

Mongolians are tough people and make living in their country look easy. But, Mongolia is not an easy option - tourism is still in its infancy so there is only a rudimentary tourist infrastructure in place. It’s actually quite refreshing but will be challenging for you.

As Jack Weatherford writes in Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World - ‘Compared to the difficulty of daily life for the herdsmen, living permanently in those areas, ours were only the smallest of irritations.’

Any questions, queries or concerns? Just send them across to me at jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk. I am always happy to be of help!

Jess