



WINTER ADVENTURE

With Ulaanbaatar Eagle Festival

March 1st 2019 - 8 Days

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 Winter Adventure In Brief



Winter in Mongolia is a remarkable experience for those willing to take themselves outside of their comfort zone. Pack your thermals and come to Mongolia in winter and do something out of the ordinary.

Three diverse and active experiences form the centrepiece to this itinerary - dog sledding at Gorkhi Terelj National Park, the Ulaanbaatar Eagle Festival and then winter horse trekking at Khustain Nuruu National Park. This is about you experiencing Mongolia as very few others get to do.

Although short, this itinerary will provide you with context, a real experience of the country and the people that call it home.

Your Itinerary Overview

Ulaanbaatar

March 1	Discover Ulaanbaatar	Private en-suite room at simple local hotel	Free transfer	Lunch and welcome drink
---------	----------------------	---	---------------	-------------------------

Gorkhi Terelj National Park

March 2 & 3	Dog Sledding	Private ger at family operated ger camp and Private en-suite room at simple local hotel	100km on dirt and asphalt road one way	Lunch
-------------	--------------	---	--	-------

Eagle Festival

March 4 & 5	Ulaanbaatar Eagle Festival	Private en-suite room at simple local hotel	Short one hour drive one way	Lunch
-------------	----------------------------	---	------------------------------	-------

Khustain Nuruu national Park

March 6 & 7	Khustain Nuruu National Park	Private ger at family operated ger camp a	Mar 6 - 150km on dirt and asphalt road	B/LD and B/D
-------------	------------------------------	---	--	--------------

Ulaan Baatar

March 8	Ulaanbaatar	Private en-suite room at simple local hotel	100km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L
---------	-------------	---	--------------------------------	-----



Day By Day



Arrive into Ulaanbaatar - whether you arrive by plane or train we'll transfer you to your hotel for free.

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.

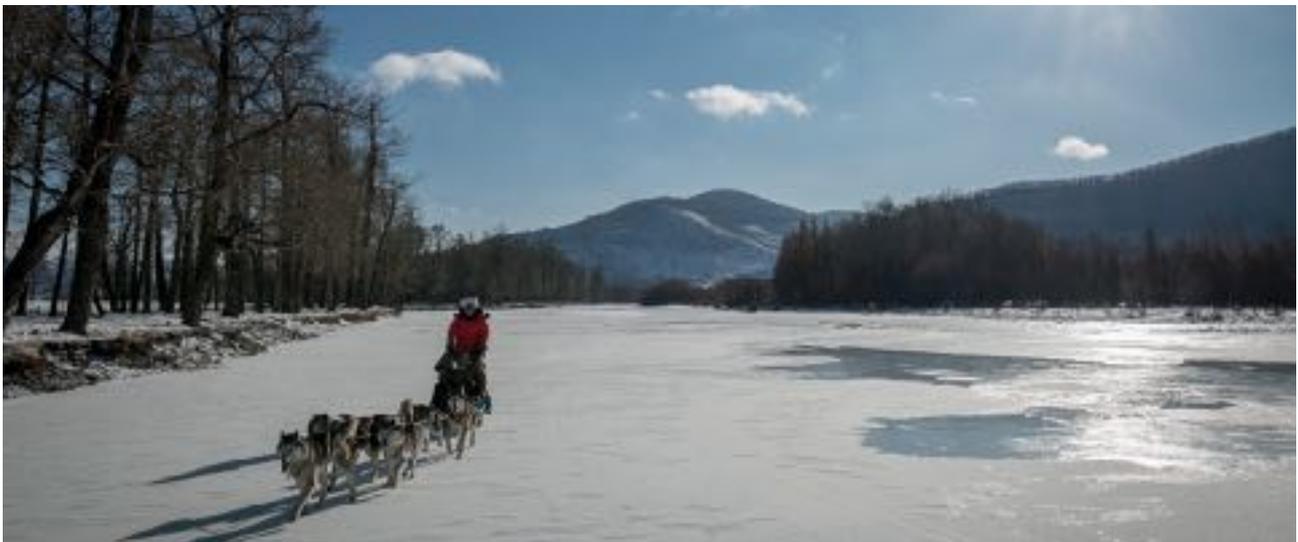
Today you'll spend the day in the company of one of my female Mongolian trip assistants. The day will include Nogoön Nuur (Green Lake) community project - a community space created for the local population of the nearby Bayangol ger districts by Ulzii - a Mongolian philanthropist.

- **Accommodation:** Private en-suite room at simple local hotel (option to upgrade if you prefer)
- **Meals:** Local lunch and welcome drink
- **Travel:** Free transfer

Mar 2 & 3

Gorkhi Terelj National Park Dog Sledding

An EL driver will transfer you out to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park. This is where you will meet your dog mushing team. These two days will be dedicated to exploring the winter landscapes on your dog sled. Your accommodation is provided by local herding families and you'll enjoy picnic lunches next to a blazing fire.



Dog Sledding

From when we drop you at their winter camp you are in the charge of the dog sledding company. They remain fully responsible for you until we collect you (generally after lunch on the final day of your sledding trip).

What To Expect

You will be the musher, standing at the back, on your sled's skis and nominally in control. It is definitely exhilarating, through stunning landscapes, but not for the faint hearted nor without risks including injury.

You will get a very brief demonstration on how to ride on the sled, how to hold on and brake. You'll learn very quickly to stay slightly flexed and lean into corners, anticipate obstacles and stay behind the sled in front of you.

All the dogs love to run. At the start of the day and after lunch the dogs will be excited and they'll take off with a rush, so hold on for a fast and thrilling ride! There's a lot of power when a team of 5-6 dogs takes off running. Any change in terrain can cause a person to lose control of their sled but any minor wipe-outs are typically cause for a good laugh. However, you must have the physical ability to stand up on slick ice and get yourselves back on the sled. If you fall off, the guides will stop your dog team up ahead.

Off The Sled

Note that dog sledding, like most winter sporting activities, may not be covered by your regular travel insurance. You may need to purchase additional cover.

Accommodation:

March 2 - Ger alongside herding family. Asian style long drop toilet (outside) and no showers

March 3 - Accommodation of your own choice (Ulaanbaatar)

Meals: Day Two - B/L/D and Day Three - B/L

Travel: Approximately 100km on asphalt and dirt road one way (roughly 2-3 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.



Drive out to Jargalantiin Am of Chinggisiiin Khuree where the eagle festival is held.

This event is organised jointly between the Ulaanbaatar City Tourism Department, the Ulaanbaatar Tourism Association and the Mongolian Eagle Hunter's Association.

The UB event, started in 2000, aims at publicising this Kazakh tradition to local Mongolians as well as westerners.

Based loosely on the eagle festival events held in western Mongolia in the autumn, the festival is a celebration of the Kazakh culture and focuses on the speed, agility and accuracy of the 'berkut' (the female Golden Eagle).

There will be delays and often plenty of waiting around but enjoy being part of this great experience as you mix in the company of local Mongolians and the Kazakh hunters.

Expect an opening ceremony, a parade of the Kazakh eagle hunters and their eagles. There is a competitive element with traditional Kazakh horse games and demonstrations of hunting skills.

On the evening of March 5, return to UB where you will enjoy dinner together with one of the Kazakh eagle hunting families we work with. They fly over from Ulgii to take part in the celebration and we invite them to have dinner with us.

- **Accommodation:** Private en-suite room at simple local hotel (option to upgrade if you prefer)
- **Meals:** Local lunch
- **Travel:** Approximately one hour driving time one



Mar 6 & 7

Khustain Nuruu National Park



Drive through the middle step to Khustai Nuruu National Park - noted for its successful reintroduction of the endemic Przewalski horse- the only wild horse to survive in modern times and known as Takhi in Mongolian.

Having arrived, visit the (recently updated) information centre located at the entrance to the park. Then, depending on your arrival time, explore the ridges with views over the distant Moltsoog Sands as well as the partly forested Khustai Mountains. Trek to look-out points, while having a reasonable chance to see red deer, corsac foxes, Siberian marmots, black vultures and other numerous raptors such as eagles and falcons.

The stars of the show are obviously the Takhi which are free ranging through the hills and mountains of the national park. The Takhi have a number of ranges which include the ridge tops of the national park. As with all wildlife, there is no guarantee of catching a sighting but we will try - whilst keeping within the strict rules and regulations of the NP.

On the second day, there is nothing pre-planned as everyone is different in what they like to do. But there's plenty of flexibility and options including a full-day horse trek and experiencing the way of life in this river valley.

- **Accommodation:** Simple private ger next to herding family. Outside Asian style squat toilet. No showers.

Supporting Community Based Tourism - Khustain

The Bayansonginot Cooperative is a community based tourism organisation based in the buffer zone of Khustain Nuruu National Park. Herding families within the area have come together to focus on developing community based tourism as an alternative income generation as well as promoting the modern day herding way of life. The women members of the cooperative are treated as equals and attend the meetings and are also involved in the decision making. They also hand-produce felt items from their sheep herds - they do this for additional income as well as a sense of empowerment. Our guests typically stay with Batchuluun - the head of the cooperative but be prepared to be flexible.

- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** Approximately 150km on dirt and asphalt road. Roughly 4 hours driving time throughout the day not including stops. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.



Return back to UB where we'll transfer you to your accommodation 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:** Private en-suite room at simple local hotel (option to upgrade if you prefer)
- **Meals:** B/L
- **Travel:** Approximately 100km on dirt and asphalt road. Roughly 2 hours driving time throughout the day not including stops. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.

Pricing And Group Size

For all of our small group trips I offer a sliding price scale. I appreciate your holiday funds are precious and so the more people that book so the price comes down and everyone benefits

Group Size - Minimum of two. Maximum of six

- 2 Guests US\$ 1685 pp
- 3-4 Guests US\$ 1370 pp
- 5 Guests US\$ 1290 pp
- 6 Guests US\$ 1220 pp

The above prices include a 15% discount pp as a thank you for choosing to travel with EL outside of the main season. We are keen to extend the season for the benefit of our Mongolian team and the rural families and Mongolian businesses we work with - to make tourism less concentrated around peak season (July) and to help the income of the people we work with be more evenly distributed. Thank you for being part of that :-)

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!

Winter Travel With EL



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.

• The Country

Mongolia is the second largest landlocked country in the world. The infrastructure is basic. Mongolian people are tough and resilient and make their way of life in both the city and countryside look easier than it is. Mongolia will challenge you and at times irritate you but it's worth the effort. Just bring your flexibility and openness with you.

• Female Mongolian trip assistant

If you want to help us invest in the future of Mongolia, then book with us.

- As a female, it is important to me to use my skills and influence to improve the prospects for other women.
- We don't source the best guides that work the tourism circuit and that already have guaranteed work with other companies. Instead, we provide training and development opportunities to Mongolian women that other companies won't take as they don't fit the stereotype or have the professional qualifications.
- Our female Mongolian trip assistants are dynamic women who are searching for an opportunity to train and develop and we provide that long-term opportunity.
- You'll travel with someone who sincerely loves their home country, loves their job and genuinely care about you as our guests.
- For us, this is a long-term investment and we invite you to part of this philosophy. We're proud to be able to provide a starting block to women in Mongolia.

• Male Mongolian Driver

- We employ eight drivers. We know each one personally.
- 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 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 we employ them.
- As well as handling the challenges of the Mongolian roads 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.
- They are great, all-round men.

• Local Families and Interaction

We work with a network of local families throughout the country. These are long-term relationships we have built up over the 13 years+ we have been based here. These are our own personal friendships.

BUT ...

- We never ask a family to change their daily living for us. 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' as this would lead to a contrived experience.
- Mongolians can be warm and welcoming and they can also be taciturn, reserved and very indifferent.
- As in our everyday lives, sometimes plans change and a family has to go to UB (for a medical reason etc). You will almost certainly comment that you will wish you had more interaction with local families but their livestock and their family life must come first. Reverse the situation for a moment and think about the impact on your life if visitors wanted to document everything about you.
- 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.

• Your Tour Vehicle - The Russian UAZ / Furgon

- Our Furgons are driver owned but we support the drivers with maintenance fees.
 - Each Furgon 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 (2018 although we're working on it for 2019. Get in touch for details) but our Furgons are fitted with grab handles in the passenger area.
 - Each EL vehicle has it's own simple mobile kitchen, its own sunshade, a small library as well as a 220v inverter/charger. We only put a maximum of three to four EL guests per vehicle.
 - Don't be scared of the road journeys. They're part of Mongolian life. Accept them as part of the experience and enjoy what we call the 'middle landscapes.'
-

• Meals

We do not provide kale smoothies or Thai curries or paella or Chinese stir fry. We just provide honest, heartening grub.

- Mongolia one of the most remote countries in the world with a population of 70 million+ livestock. The food Mongolians eat reflect this.
 - However, 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, your trip assistants 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. If you're the type of person that must have five pieces of fruit a day then you may struggle.
 - We often include the families we work with in our meals and so cook to please all including the EL team. However, we do adapt to those with dietary requirements. We frequently cater for vegetarians, those who are following dairy or gluten free diets and even vegans.
-

• Weather

Be prepared for everything. Mongolia's weather system has a reputation for a reason. And yes, it may well rain. See it as a blessing. Mongolian herders celebrate rain as without it fresh pasture cannot grow and they lose their livelihoods.

• Family Provided 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 luxury 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 so do expect other westerners during peak times.
-

• Exclusivity

- We don't offer it ... as this limits the income of the host family. We try to get the right balance but during peak season please accept that you might see other westerners,
 - Also, local domestic Mongolians LOVE exploring their home country. Travelling in large groups they can be loud and boisterous ... but they are great fun and of course, they are Mongolian and spending time with them gives you a different perspective to the country you have come to experience.
-

• Tourist Ger Camps

- If requested and in some locations (such as Khovsgol), we do offer accommodation at ger camps. We don't book the most luxurious or the most exclusive. Instead, we choose the ones that we think work best for you and your style of trip as well as the locations you are visiting.
 - There **WILL** be times during your journey when the availability of certain amenities at these ger camps may be lacking. The reasons for this can be varied - low season; high season; electricity/generator problems; remote locations; the simple fact that some amenities are only catered for between certain times of the day. Examples of this could be a ger camp having a lack of hot water, or only having hot water at certain times.
 - Lighting in the evening at some places may be by candle-light, and electricity may not be available.
-

• Local Hotels

- We don't use hotels in all itineraries.
 - 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.
-

• Toilets And Showers

- Toilets - Some will be better than expected. Some will be worse than expected.
 - Showers - Local Mongolian families don't have access to running water. They visit the local town shower house. So this is what you do as well. Why? It gives you an introduction to real daily life for a majority of Mongolians in both urban and rural areas. You get your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of 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.

21st Century Mongolia Versus Guidebook Mongolia



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 herders 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 a 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 herders, 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