



# NORTHERN MONASTERIES

Three days including our free city walking tour

**‘The personal touch made us feel special.’**

**Emily Brackstone, tailor made experience, 2018**

This is a customisable trip. It is adaptable, giving you the freedom to build a unique and personal trip for your chosen date. Upgrade your accommodation for all - or just part - of your trip, slow down the pace with few extra nights here and there or add a few more active adventures along the way. 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.

# Our Tailor Made Tours In Brief



My tailor made trips are designed to provide you with the ‘essence of Mongolia.’ To give you an insight into the country and the variety of people and the diversity of the way of life in 21st Century Mongolia.

I use the information you provide in your emails and create an experience around what you’re looking for and the EL style.

You travel with an EL team of Mongolian (male) driver and (female) trip assistant. You have your own private EL Russian Furgon 4x4 van. Yes, there is structure to the itinerary but there is plenty of flexibility as well. Each itinerary is designed to provide you with a more individual style of travel - time to explore and discover each location for yourself.

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.

# Quick Itinerary Overview

## Ulaanbaatar

Day to suit you	City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Airport transfer	Local lunch and welcome drink
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## Northern Landscapes

Day One	Trans Mongolian I Darkhan	Provincial Hotel	Approx 7 hours on local train (four bed compartments)	L/D
Day Two	Amarbayasgalant Monastery	Basic but private ger at family operated ger camp	2.5 hours driving time	B/L/D

## Ulaan Baatar

Day Three	Aglag Buteel Khiid I Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	385km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L
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# Day to suit you

## Discover Ulaanbaatar



A more local introduction to this vibrant frontier style with our free city walking tour.

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 Nogoos 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:** Of your own choice
- **Meals:** Local lunch and welcome drink
- **Travel:** Free transfer



Transfer to the train station for your train ride to Darkhan - a small industrial city in the north of Mongolia. You'll travel second class in a compartment with four beds and your EL trip assistant will accompany you. The journey is approximately 6 hours and 30 minutes and is a delightful way to leave the city - as the rolling steppe slowly unfolds. On arrival at Darkhan, transfer to your local hotel.

Is Darkhan considered a highlight of Mongolia by the guidebook writers? No! But, it is a vibrant town and staying here will give you an understanding as to the way of life of Mongolia's small town inhabitants.

That's why we include an evening at the local Mingo Coffee Shop. It is a real community hub for the local population. Each night the coffee shop puts on a different club - such as their English Language Club. And as guests of EL you go along and help. It's a great way to meet the younger modern generation of Mongolia. They love receiving western guests.

- Accommodation: Comfort Hotel
- Meals: B/L/D
- Travel: Roughly 20 minutes transfer to UB train station. Train time is approximately 1015 -1733. Second class carriage (four bed compartment). Toilets are on board and also hot water.

# Day 2

## Amarbaysgalant Khiid

En route back, you will have time to stop at Aslag Butsa Temple. Established by Mongolia's renowned Buddhist lama and artist Purevbat, it is located within a stunning mountain forest steppe landscape. Granite rocks have been carved as statues of Buddhist tradition, each signifying a particular symbolic meaning. There is also an extensive meditation route designed to harmonise with the natural environment.

Amarbaysgalant Khiid is situated in a haven of rugged beauty in the cul-de-sac of a long, deep valley backed by Mount Buren-Khaan against which the monastery is built. The valley is well-watered by the Iver River and has long provided an essential water source for nomadic herders and their livestock.

At Amarbaysgalant we work with Davisuren. She is a grandmother who's son is a herder out in the Iver Valley. She lives in a small house located close to the monastery and has a small shop that the young monks and local community members use. Davaasuren offers two gers for visitors to stay in. Her way of life is basic and so is the ger accommodation she offers. But the location is fantastic - next to the monastery which means you are free to explore the monastery and it's stunning surroundings easily on foot.



- **Accommodation:** Basic but private ger at family operated ger camp (2-3 gers). Asian style outside toilet. No showers.
- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** Approx 2.5 hours driving time on dirt and asphalt road. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.

# Day 3

## Aglag Buteel Khiid | Ulaanbaatar

En-route back to UB, stop at Aglag Buteel Temple. Established by Mongolia's renowned Buddhist lama and artist Purevbat, it is located within a stunning mountain forest steppe landscape. Granite rocks have been carved as statues of Buddhist tradition, each signifying a particular symbolic meaning. There is also a road 'a kora' meditation route designed to harmonise with the natural environment.



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:** Of your own choice
- **Meals:** Breakfast / Lunch
- **Travel:** 385km on asphalt and dirt road (approx 6-7 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.

# Pricing and Group Size

**Group Size - Flexible with discounts available for children. Price below is for a max of 4 people per vehicle**

- 2 Guests      US\$ 715 pp
- 3-5 Guests    US\$ 580 pp
- 6 Guests      US\$ 520 pp

## 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!



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.
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## • 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.
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## • City Nomads Folding Bike

- Each of our Furgon vans will carry ONE City Nomads folding bike. This is a complimentary service we offer.
- We opted for a folding bike as it fits well in the van. It is also more adaptable for a range of heights.
- They are not mountain bikes and not offered as such. It is just a way for you to take off for an hour or so to explore the local area independently.

## • 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.'
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## • 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.
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## • 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.**

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## • 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.
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## • 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.
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## • 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.
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## • Tent Camps

- Not all itineraries include tent camping. Please check your itinerary.
  - We use VANGO Hurricane or Nemesis tents. There is also always a kitchen tent and also a toilet tent. However, this is not the same as a 5\* safari in Africa!
  - When camping, we do not camp too close to family gers as this intrudes on their privacy. However, local life is only a short walk away. If you like landscapes then you will love our campsites.
  - If you are a solo traveller, we aim for you to have your own tent with no single supplement required. However, this is a free service so please understand it cannot be guaranteed.
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## • 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.
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## • 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

# 21st Century Mongolia Versus Guidebook Mongolia



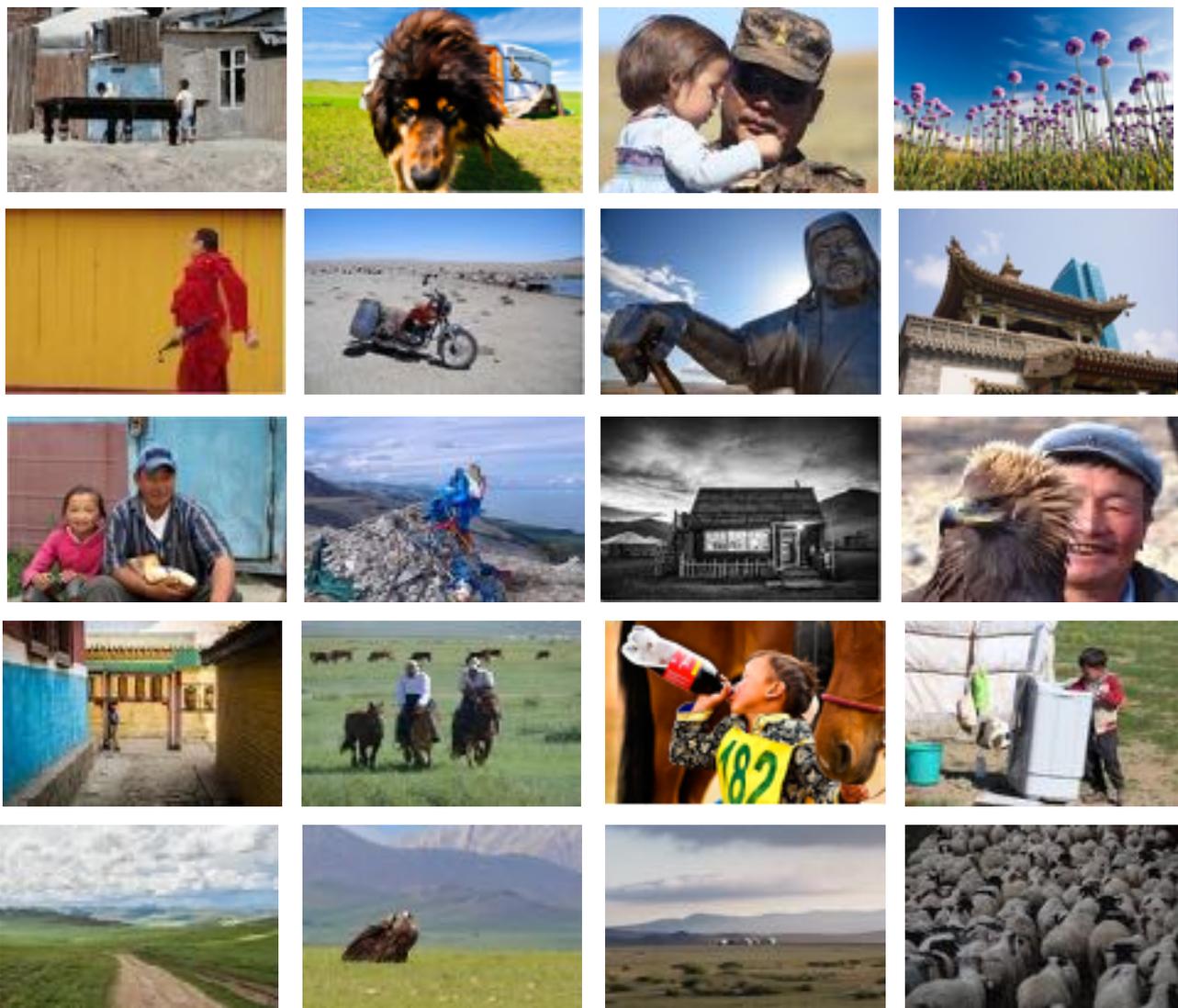
Mongolia is frequently depicted as a pristine untouched wilderness where the traditional nomadic way of life still remains. Well. It is. And it isn't. Our trips focus on 21st Century Mongolia - we try to provide a 'realistic' overview rather than that portrayed by guidebooks and other tour companies. 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](mailto:jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk). I am always happy to be of help!**

*Jess*