



# ALTAI AND EAGLES

With Nauryz Festival

March 13th 2019 - 11 Days

‘The entire trip was a truly great experience; everything went well and was incredibly interesting from the beginning to the end. I particularly liked that Jess and her team are working closely with local communities in Western Mongolia. This allowed us not only a very intimate glimpse into their daily private lives but also we had chance to interact directly with them. All this was managed by Jess and her team with great respect and without being too obtrusive. Somehow, Jess and her team made us feel not like tourists.’

Katerina Fricova, Altai and Eagles

This is a small group trip. However, our maximum group size is six - which is refreshingly small. These small group sizes mean that our trips are more respectful for your host families that we work in long-term local community partnerships with. It also means you’ll be one of few rather than one of many and this leads to a more genuine experience as well as a more personal and real insight for you as our guest. It also means that no two trips are ever the same as we can keep things flexible.

# Our Altai and Eagles in Brief



The wild landscapes of western Mongolia form the stunning backdrop to this cultural adventure. The Kazakhs are Mongolia's largest ethnic minority group with approximately 100,000 living in the provinces of western Mongolia. Amid arid yet strikingly beautiful landscapes the hunters have a way of life that has been shaped by history, geography and political change.

This small group experience provides a great opportunity to experience first hand the life of a Kazakh eagle hunter as you spend time living alongside a hunter and his family witnessing and being part of their daily lives. It also combines living alongside the families with the traditional festival of Nauryz - the Kazakh celebration of the coming of spring. You also get to experience the (lesser known) two-day Nauryz Eagle Festival held in the small community of Altansogts. The festival is a celebration of the Kazakh culture and focuses on the speed, agility and accuracy of the 'berkut' (the female Golden Eagle). The festival provides you with a wealth of cultural experience as you mix in the company of small town folk, nomads and the Kazakh hunters.

These are our own personal friendships that we have built up over the past 13 years. We form long-term local community partnerships throughout the country and work side by side with each family. Our experiences are put together in a way which benefits the eagle hunters and their families, rather than disrupting their lives. We like to do things a little differently so we leave the plan each day entirely flexible and in the hands of your Kazakh eagle hunter host. This leads to a more respectful and genuine experience as well as a more personal and real insight for you as our guest. Because of the way we work you'll get an original insider experience.

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

## Ulaan Baatar

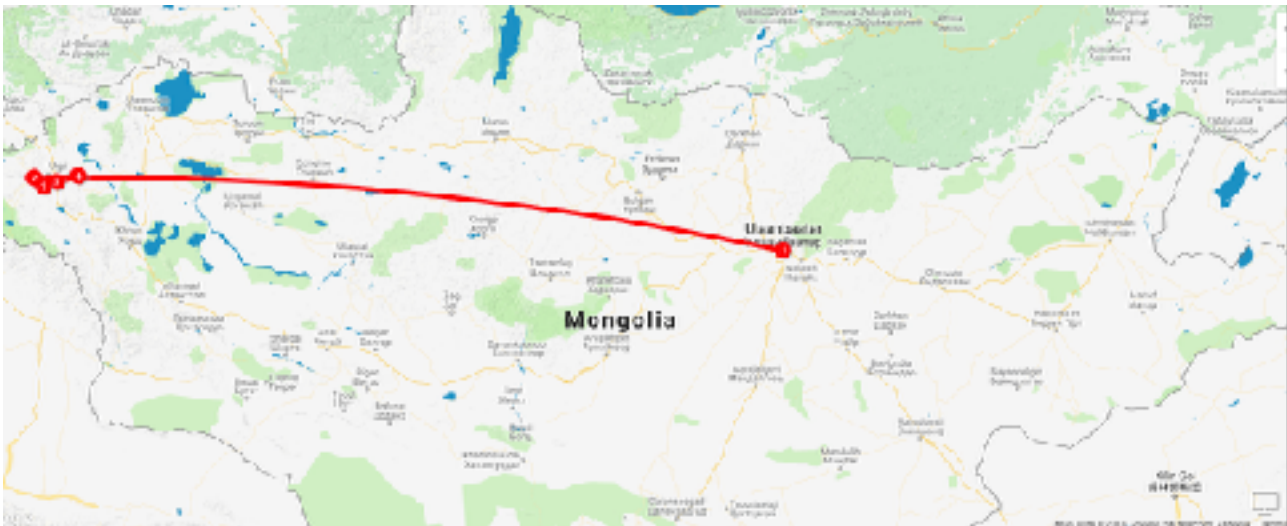
March 13	City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch and welcome drink
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## Altai

March 14 - 16	Fly Ulgii   Ulaankhuus   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	Mat on floor of the family home of your host Kazakh eagle hunter	March 14 - Transfer to airport, domestic flight and 60km on dirt road	D * other meals depending on flight time and B/L/D
March 17 and 18	Sagsai   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	Mat on floor of the family home of your host Kazakh eagle hunter	March 17 - 60km on dirt road	B/L/D
March 19	Tolbo Nuur	Mat on floor of the small town house of your host	120km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L/D
March 20 & 21	Nauryz Eagle Festival	Mat on floor of the family home of your host Kazakh eagle hunter	March 20 - 60km on dirt road	B/L/D
March 22	Ulgii and Nauryz	Mat on floor of the small town house of your host and homestay in Ulgii (a mattress on the floor of the family living room)	60km on dirt road	B/L/D

## Ulaan Baatar

March 23	Domestic flight back to UB	Your own choice of accommodation	Domestic flight and airport transfer	B * other meals depending on flight time
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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 deals 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.





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 as well as other local locations in the city.

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



# Mar 14

## Fly Ulgii | Ulaankhuus

Fly to Ulgii - the provincial capital of Mongolian's westernmost aimag where you will meet your EL team before you transfer to the community of Ulaankhuus - a district of Bayan Ulgii Province. In this valley close to the Khovd River, the Kazakh eagle hunter Bashahan and his family have their winter pasture where you'll be warmly welcomed like old friends and you'll share their home with them.



- **Accommodation:** Homestay. A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house of the Bashahan family. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.
  - **Meals:** D \* other meals depending on flight time
  - **Travel:** Up to one hour transfer to Chinggis Khan Airport and 60km on dirt road (approx 2 hours driving time). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
  - **Flight Departure and Arrival Time** TBC. Weight restriction 15kg (10kg check-in and 5kg hand luggage). Hand luggage 'officially' restricted to 1-piece. Excess baggage charges are between \$4-\$7 per kilo depending on the route. Please note that the domestic airline may change the flight time schedule closer to the day of departure
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You will notice that we don't detail what you will do on these two days - that's because we do things a little differently and leave the plan in the hands of your Kazakh eagle hunter host as this leads to a more respectful experience. As it is March the eagles will not be used for hunting as the prey will be carrying young. However, you can still accompany the eagle hunters on a full-day horse trek and they do still train and fly their eagles. We often have great picnic lunches outside in the sunshine which Bashakhan loves to attend.

- **Accommodation:** Homestay. A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house of the Bashahan family. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.
  - **Meals:** B/L/D
  - **Travel:** -
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# Mar 17 & 18

## Sagsai | Homestay | Horse trek



For your next two days you will experience the way of life of the eagle hunters Aibolat and his brother Baibolat. We work closely with this young family who are now head of their household having lost their father.

If you were to meet Aibolat or Baibolat in the street then you would probably dismiss them as young modern Kazakhs. However, both are herders and each owns and trains an eagle. Both love the Kazakh game of Buzkhashi - the tug of war with a goat carcass.

Their way of life is entirely different to that of most of the other older eagle hunters that we work with and that's one reason we work with them - as it gives you a contrasting insight into the diversity of the way of life for the Kazakh eagle hunters.

We leave the second day flexible but this mostly explore the region on foot or spend time with the family in their home learning about their way of life. As well as experiencing his way of life as an eagle hunter and a herder, join him in a game of Uno which he loves!

- **Accommodation:** Homestay. A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house of the Aibolat family. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.
- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** March Roughly 60km on dirt road (approx 2 hours driving time). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.

# Mar 19

## Tolbo Nuur



Today we travel to Tolbo Nuur - a large alpine lake. At 2080m above sea level the colour of the lake makes a big contrast with the surrounding landscapes including the views of Sairyn Uul (3981m), a glacier-capped peak to the east. As well as exploring the landscapes we will also visit a couple of friends in their homes.

The power of the landscapes is an integral part of this journey. By travelling through you'll gain an understanding how the landscapes and the challenges that the locals face within them have helped to form the Mongolian personality - the individualism, hardiness, endurance, self-sufficiency, tolerance and their spirit of freedom.

You'll return to Ulgii in the evening to the home of Jako and Baurjan - our Kazakh translators where you can enjoy a hot shower at local town shower house.

- **Accommodation:** A mattress on the floor of the family living room. Outside toilet. The local town shower house. Your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life
- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** Up to 120km on dirt and asphalt road (approximately 4-5 hours driving time not including stops spread throughout the day). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.



Hospitality is a key ingredient in the Kazakh culture. This is the incredible welcome table that typically awaits us at the home of the Kazakh families that host us.

As Kazakh culture dictates, they are warm and generous hosts. At some point during your time in Ulgii you will try 'Besbarmak', a dish consisting of boiled horse or mutton. This is one of the most popular Kazakh dishes and is also called 'five fingers' because of the way it is eaten - using your hands.





Drive to the small community of Altansogts for the two-day Nauryz Eagle Festival. The festival is a celebration of the Kazakh culture and focuses on the speed, agility and accuracy of the 'berkut' (the female Golden Eagle). The festival provides you with a wealth of cultural experience as you mix in the company of small town folk, nomads and the Kazakh hunters.

This day is all about flexibility for you but your EL team will be on hand throughout the event. You will have full access to the van where you can keep your belongings safely and where you can come to warm up if necessary. Your trip assistant will be with you and will help to explain the traditions of eagle hunting as well as the rules of the competitions taking place throughout the day.

One warning, there may be plenty of international visitors at the event which may come as a slight shock. But, when it comes to festivals in Mongolia, don't get caught up in notions of authenticity. The local festivals always feature a lot of local involvement drawing local Mongolian spectators as well as westerners and the locals are always more enthusiastic. They often feel like a party for locals, thrown by locals.

**If you only want to attend one of the festival dates then we can always arrange a horse trek on the other day for you. It is entirely flexible.**

- **Accommodation:** Homestay. A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house of the Agalai family. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.
- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** March 20 - Roughly 60km on dirt road (approx 2 hours driving time). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.



During your time in Bayan Ulgii Province you will have the services of a Kazakh translator working alongside your EL trip assistant. This is not a professional translator. This is either Jako or her husband Baurjan - local Kazakhs who can speak Mongolian (and depending on who works on your specific trip, a little English) and who supplement their income by working as translators specifically for EL. It could be that your questions have to be translated from English into Mongolian and then into Kazakh (and the answers vice versa). It might at times test your patience but just relax and enjoy being with Jako and Baurjan who have become part of the EL family.



Travel back to Ulgii where you will be hosted by our Kazakh translator Jako and her family. Here you will celebrate Nauryz with the family - the Nauryz Festival in Mongolia is celebrated by Kazakhs throughout the country. Nauryz translates into 'new day' and falls on March 21st. Nauryz is considered the first day of the spring equinox and is a celebration not only about spring but about renewal as well.

Ulgii is a predominantly Kazakh city where a Muslim influence is widespread, from street signs to clothes and food, and gives the town its diverse atmosphere. As well as spending time at the family home do as the locals do and visit the market where you can purchase some locally made wool and embroidery crafts and take in the view from Ulgii's 'Zaisan' - always popular with local families. Also consider the surprisingly interesting local museum.

And for those that think why both visiting Ulgii?... remember, for each of the families you live with, Ulgii is part of their way of life ... they use it for shopping, for meeting friends, for attending school or visiting the doctor. It's as much part of their life as hunting with eagles is.



- **Accommodation:** A mattress on the floor of the family living room. Outside toilet. The local town shower house. Your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life
  - **Meals:** B/L/D
  - **Travel:** Up to 60km on dirt road (approximately 2 hours driving time not including stops).
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On arrival back into UB, 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 own choice
  - **Meals:** Breakfast \* other meals depending on flight time
  - **Travel:** Short transfer to Ulgii Airport. Up to 1 hour transfer time from Chinggis Khan airport
  - **Flight Departure and Arrival Time TBC.** Weight restriction 15kg (10kg check-in and 5kg hand luggage). Hand luggage 'officially' restricted to 1-piece. Excess baggage charges are between \$4-\$7 per kilo depending on the route. Please note that the domestic airline may change the flight time schedule closer to the day of departure
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# 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\$ 2875 pp + domestic flight of approximately 550,000 MNT pp
- 3-4 Guests    US\$ 2100 pp + domestic flight of approximately 550,000 MNT pp
- 5 Guests      US\$ 1925 pp + domestic flight of approximately 550,000 MNT pp
- 6 Guests      US\$ 1690 pp + domestic flight of approximately 550,000 MNT 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.
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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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## • 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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## • 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
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## • 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](mailto:jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk). I am always happy to be of help!**

*Jess*