

Gobi Conservation and Research Expedition
June 6th - 16th 2020 - 11 Days

GOBI CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH EXPEDITION

(IN ALLIANCE WITH ASSOCIATION GOVIIN)



Your Quick Overview

Mongolia is a country with a diverse and fragile environment traditionally preserved through long-standing environmental customs and beliefs. These are now being rediscovered and re-emphasised in the face of the challenges of 21st century modern life. The fight has been taken on at a local level and our Conservation and Research Expedition will allow you to come into contact with environmental safeguarding and protection at a grass-roots level in Mongolia - specifically in the connection with the Asian Wild Ass (Khulan in Mongolian).

This experience is in alliance with the Association Goviin Khulan NGO (see below). You will gain an understanding and privileged insight into the true wild Gobi - specifically the ecology of the little visited Dorn gobi (east Gobi) region. Goviin Khulan practice people-centred conservation and during this journey as well as learning more about the wildlife of the Gobi Desert you will meet the local people such as Buddhist monks, small market gardeners and nomadic herders who are partners in conservation.

You will be trained to use several kinds of technology such as trail cameras and all data collected during this conservation expedition will be used as part of the conservation program - continuing to protect the endangered Mongolian Khulan/Mongolian Wild Ass and its habitat.

Ulaanbaatar

June 6	Final Arrival Day Discover Ulaanbaatar Free city walking tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch Welcome drink
June 7	Khustain Nuruu National Park Takhi horses	Your own choice of accommodation	100km on asphalt and dirt road one way	L

Gobi Desert

June 8 and 9	Ikh Nart Nature Reserve	Tent Camp		L/D and B/L/D
June 10	Khamariin Khiid Monastery	Tent Camp	310km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L/D
June 11 - 15	Research Area	Tent camp Local Hotel	4-6 hours driving time between separate sites	B/L/D

Ulaanbaatar

June 16	Return Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	550km on asphalt road	B/L/D
---------	--------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------------	-------

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.

Why Khulan?

The Mongolian Khulan (*Equus hemionus hemionus*) is one of the 5 recognised sub-species of the Asiatic Wild Ass and represents the largest population of this species in the world. As a result, Mongolia is a very important place for the conservation of this species due to having the densest distribution of Khulan in the world. However, the population of the Mongolian Khulan is at risk due to illegal hunting, habitat fragmentation and competition with domestic livestock to access to natural resources - Khulan numbers have declined significantly. Internationally, the Mongolian Khulan is listed in the Red List of the IUCN as 'Endangered', and 'Very Rare' and 'Endangered' in the Mongolian Red Book (Mongolian Red List of Mammals).

This Conservation and Research Expedition has been put together by Anne-Camille Souris - an ethologist and a member of the SSC/IUCN Equid Specialist Group since 2007. As president and research manager of the Association Goviin Khulan, Anne-Camille has been studying the Mongolian Khulan since 2004. She first conducted research on this sub-species in the southwest Gobi during the summer 2004. In 2006 she then started research and conservation work on the populations that occur in the south and southeast Gobi where there was less work towards the conservation of this endangered species. In 2007, she co-founded the Association Goviin Khulan to enhance protection of the endangered Mongolian Khulan. This trip will either be led by Anne-Camille or one of her research associates.

Association Goviin Khulan work to protect the endangered Mongolian Khulan (*Equus Hemionus Hemionus*) and its habitat in partnership with local rangers and communities of the southeast Gobi. This a multidisciplinary and innovative approach that takes into consideration the needs, difficulties and culture of the local area and involves directly the local population in research activities for long term success.

How Will The Conservation And Research Trip Be Of Benefit To Both The Local Community and The Wildlife?

- A group size of a maximum of six has been set in order to limit negative impacts on wildlife and its habitat.
 - A financial donation per person will be made by Eternal Landscapes to Association Goviin Khulan. This financial donation will help Association Goviin Khulan. to conduct new research field trips, buy additional technical equipment for their research team and local partners (park rangers and citizen conservationists who work with them) and print new educational materials.
 - Each guest will receive a copy of Anne-Camille's conservation book The Lost Khulan of The Gobi with its beautiful illustrations by the Mongolian artist Zolbootulguldur O. The funds of this book go back into conservation education carried out by AGK in Mongolia.
 - It is very important to consider the needs and difficulties of the local population that share the same habitat as the wildlife and to involve the population ensures the long term success of a conservation program. The trip will contribute to community development in the areas where the project is conducted. This includes the diversification of incomes of the communities visited and with whom you stay, training and employment of local guides and rangers to guide you and assist Association Goviin Khulan in collecting data.
 - Data collected will be used in the continued protection of Gobi wildlife. This range of data will include use of water sources by Mongolian khulans/wild asses and by other species (wild and domestic), watering behaviour of the Mongolian Khulan, nature of interactions between khulans/wild asses, wild and domestic fauna and human activities at and in the surroundings of water sources, illegal activities occurring in our study area and the biodiversity of our study area.
-

Day To Day

June 6

Final Arrival Day | Discover Ulaanbaatar | City Walking Tour



Ulaanbaatar is home to roughly 45% of Mongolia's population and our free city walking tour will give you a more local introduction to this vibrant frontier style city with a strong Mongolian identity of its own.

Yes, the city is chaotic and loud and not as glamorous as other capital cities but it is the beating heart of Mongolia and the hub of contemporary Mongolian urban life. The reality for many Mongolians takes place in this urban context, in a city they are striving to develop and improve. Ulaanbaatar deserves to be appreciated and explored as the urban centre that it is.

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 areas of the city including Gandan Monastery.

You'll also have lunch with a local family as well as exploring other areas of the city.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Of your own choice
 - Meals: Local Lunch | Welcome Drink
 - Travel: Free transfer
-

June 7

Khustain Nuruu National Park



Drive to Khustai Nuruu National Park - noted for its successful reintroduction of the endemic Przewalski horse (*Equus przewalskii*). This protected area is considered a conservation success story in Mongolia and part of UNESCO's 'Man and the Biosphere' reserves. The Khustain National Park Trust was established in 2003 and deals with the management of the national park contracting with Mongolia's Ministry of Nature and Environment. Khustain is now run as a dedicated NGO specialising in nature and environmental research and conservation. As the Przewalski horse (known as takhi in Mongolian) is a flagship species, its protection also helps to increase environmental awareness in Mongolia.

Depending on your arrival time, explore the ridges with views over the distant Moltsoq Sands as well as the partly forested Khustai Mountains. We will trek to incredible 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.

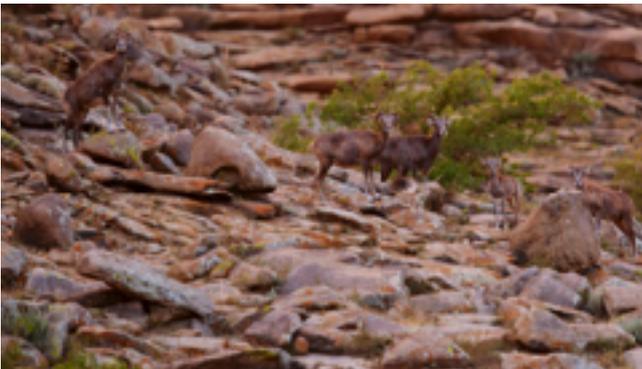
The stars of the show are obviously the Takhi which are free ranging through the hills and mountains of the national park. The Takhi have a number of ranges which include the ridge tops of the national park. As with all wildlife, there is no guarantee of catching a sighting but we will try - whilst keeping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

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Of your own choice
 - **Meals:** Lunch
 - **Travel:** 110km on asphalt and dirt road (approx 2 hours driving time ONE WAY not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
-

June 8 & 9

Ikh Nart Nature Reserve



As you travel south through steppe to desert terrain, you will start to get an understanding of the diversity of Mongolia's natural habitats. You could observe wildlife native to the Gobi - especially herds of White Tailed Gazelle.

Your destination is Ikh Nart - a wildlife region of rocky terrain and canyons. Located in Dornogobi Aimag, this reserve harbours a wide diversity of flora and fauna and is a long-term study site between Denver Zoo and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. The studies aim to understand the ecology of the region, the behaviour of the resident species and to improve conservation management in the region.

Three projects are on-going - the Argali Sheep / Siberian Ibex Project, the Carnivore Project and the Cinereous Vulture Project. Although small (66,000 hectares), Ikh Nart represents a stronghold for the globally threatened Argali Sheep - the largest mountain sheep in the world. It is also one of the most significant breeding sites for the Cinereous Vulture (European Black Vulture).

Spend the second day discovering the wildlife and biodiversity of the region together with your Association Goviin Khulan guide.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Tent Camp. UK VANGO tents. We also provide a kitchen tent and a toilet tent. I call it a 'loo with a view!' Solo travellers receive their own tent. No single supplement required.
- **Meals:** L/D and B/L/D
- **Travel:** June 8 - 320km on asphalt and dirt road (approx 7 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.

June 10

Khamariin Khiid Monastery



Khamariin Khiid is a monastery that is considered an energy centre known as Shambala created around the cult of a Mongolian monk - Danzan Ravjaa . The monastery was destroyed during the 1930s political purges but has been reconstructed and is a major pilgrimage site for Mongolians. It also gives spectacular view points out over the Gobi.



June 11 - 15

Research Area - Mandakh, Ulgii, Queen's Spring & Golden Mountain



Continue on to the community of Mandakh. This is the start of five-days spent in the Goviin Khulan research area. Examples of the activities that could be conducted in the research area are:

- Observation of wildlife species including recording GPS positions for each species observed
- Recording of the presence of each species observed including animal tracks, dung and scats.
- Settlement of camera traps at strategic locations
- Sampling of plants in specific areas
- Record of carcasses found,
- Meeting with rangers and families involved in the project
- Cleaning of specific sites

Areas you will visit include:

Golden Mountain

Officially known as Ergeliin Zuu, this is a protected natural reserve where dinosaur fossils were discovered in the 1920s by Roy Chapman Andrews and the Central Asiatic Expeditions. Gobi fossils tend to be well-preserved, revealing minute details of life during the Late Cretaceous Period – 80 million years ago. You may also observe black-tailed gazelles, Mongolian (white-tailed) gazelles, Mongolian khulan and birds of prey. Part of the day will be spent meeting a local family who work as 'citizen conservationists' for Association Goviin Khulan.

Native Mountain



Image by Anne-Camille Souris of AGK

'Native Mountain' is home to a Buddhist monastery - Ulgii Khiid. In Mongolia, many mountains, rivers and other natural spaces are revered as sacred - either because they are the residing place of a deity or because they are viewed as a deity in themselves. Often, monasteries were built on such sites as was the one built at Native Mountain.

The monastery of the site of the 'Native Mountain' was destroyed during the 1930s political purges but since then re-introduction of Buddhism in the 1990s some of Mongolia's ruined monasteries and temples have become operational again.

At 'Native Mountain' you will meet with the community of monks and you will have the opportunity to discuss with the monks about their involvement in the Association Goviin Khulan conservation program and their actions and motivations towards the protection of the Gobi ecosystem. During your time here you should be able to listen to morning prayers.

During part of your visit, you will be specifically focusing on the observation of wildlife to collect additional data for AGK. This will include visiting a site of petrified wood (it has been protected since 1996 but is threatened because of illegal robbery of the artefacts) as well as meeting community members such as Gansukh and Otgon and families who are now involved in the khulan project as Citizen Conservationists.



Image by Anne-Camille Souris of AGK

Queen's Spring

Located just 150km from the Chinese border, this region is a natural habitat for the khulan. It is an area where you can expect to find water holes created by the khulan.



Although it might just look like a hole in the ground, water sources are an important factor in the distribution of Khulan populations including natural springs such as the one at Queen's Spring. In the summer months the species occurs within 10-15 km of standing water, and this range increases in the winter when it is not restricted by water availability as there is typically snow fall. In fact, the Association Goviin Khulan have observed Khulan digging holes in a dry river bed to access water.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Tent Camp. UK VANGO tents. We also provide a kitchen tent and a toilet tent. I call it a 'loo with a view!' Solo travellers receive their own tent. No single supplement required.
 - It might be that at Native Mountain you can stay in simple accommodation provided by the monks but this is not guaranteed or confirmed. No showers apart from if en-route the local town shower house is open (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:** Driving will be between sites. Most days will be 4-5 hours driving time on dirt roads (not including stops) although some may be shorter or longer depending on the route and / or the activities. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
-

June 16

Ulaanbaatar



Following the route of the Trans-Mongolian train line you will head back to UB. On the drive today you will travel through a diversity of Mongolia's natural habitats - everything from the wide gravel plains to the gentle rolling steppe.

On arrival into UB, we'll transfer you to your accommodation and the rest of the day will be yours to create your own experience. You'll meet for a farewell dinner.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Of your own choice
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** 550km on asphalt road to (approx 8-9 hours driving time 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 - Maximum of six. Minimum of two required for a guaranteed departure

- 2 Guests US\$ 2670 pp
- 3-4 Guests US\$ 2155 pp
- 5 Guests US\$ 1910 pp
- 6 Guests US\$ 1700 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.

Travelling In Mongolia

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. We're on hand to iron out any niggles and make the experience as smooth as possible but please remember that most of these hiccups are part of life in Mongolia and therefore travelling in Mongolia. We expect you to bring your flexibility and sense of adventure with you.

Travel Times

The travel times are listed under the breakdown of the daily itinerary (under the subheading logistics). Please make sure you are aware of these travel times but remember that an integral part of Mongolian culture is not to ask about the length (time) of any road journey. Mongolia can be a challenging destination, road conditions can change dramatically with the weather and some drives may become longer as a result. But, don't be put off by the road journeys. They're part of Mongolian life. Accept them as part of the experience - Mongolia really is about the journey as much as the destination.

Your Tour Vehicle - The Russian UAZ \ Furgon Van

- 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 (2019 although we're working on it for 2020. Get in touch for details if you're concerned) 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.

Your EL Team

Female Mongolian trip assistant

- 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 want the opportunity to work in tourism (whether that be for a professional reason, for development of personal skills or for economic empowerment) but that other companies won't take as they don't fit the stereotype or have the 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. They also have a respectful connection with each of the families we work with and this leads to a more genuine insight for you.
- For us, this is a long-term investment and we invite you to part of this bigger travel philosophy. We're proud to be able to provide a starting block to women in Mongolia.

Male Mongolian Driver

- We employ ten drivers. We know each one and their family personally.
- They are not modern city men - they are more traditional men - often now overlooked by other tour companies who prefer younger more international Mongolians who speak English. We wanted to provide equal opportunities and so as our trip assistants are female and typically younger with a more modern outlook, so our drivers are all male, older and from more traditional backgrounds. We find it is a partnership that works well.
- Yes, their English is limited but their role is to handle the Mongolian roads and not to converse fluently in a multitude of languages.
- Our 'boys' have superb driving skills, are expert mechanics and are supremely talented at the skill of 'mongolclok' - improvising the Mongolian 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 of the strong and silent type but take the time to know them and you'll see why we employ them and why they are an essential part of our EL family and great, all-round men.

Logistics - Meals

- 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. Also, we take food miles into consideration and prefer to purchase produce local to Mongolia so we do not provide kale smoothies or Thai curries or paella or Chinese stir fry. We just provide honest, heartening grub.
- 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 but as mentioned, there will be limitations in place.

Logistics - Weather

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. We'll prepare you for what weather to expect during your trip (including links to the long-range weather forecast for the regions you will be visiting) and also provide a detailed packing list on booking.

Accommodation - 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.

Accommodation - Toilets & Showers (Family & Homestay)

- **A majority of Mongolia's population do not have access to running water.**
- Toilets - Some will be better than expected. Some will be worse than expected. Most will be outside long (or short) drop Asian style and if it is at a family home then the toilet will be shared by you and the family. The toilets are not there to disgust you - this is the reality of life on the ground.
- Showers - Most Mongolians visit the local town shower house. So this is what you do as well. It gives you an introduction to real daily life for a majority of Mongolians in both urban and rural areas as well as a hot shower. 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

Accommodation - 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.

21st Century Mongolia

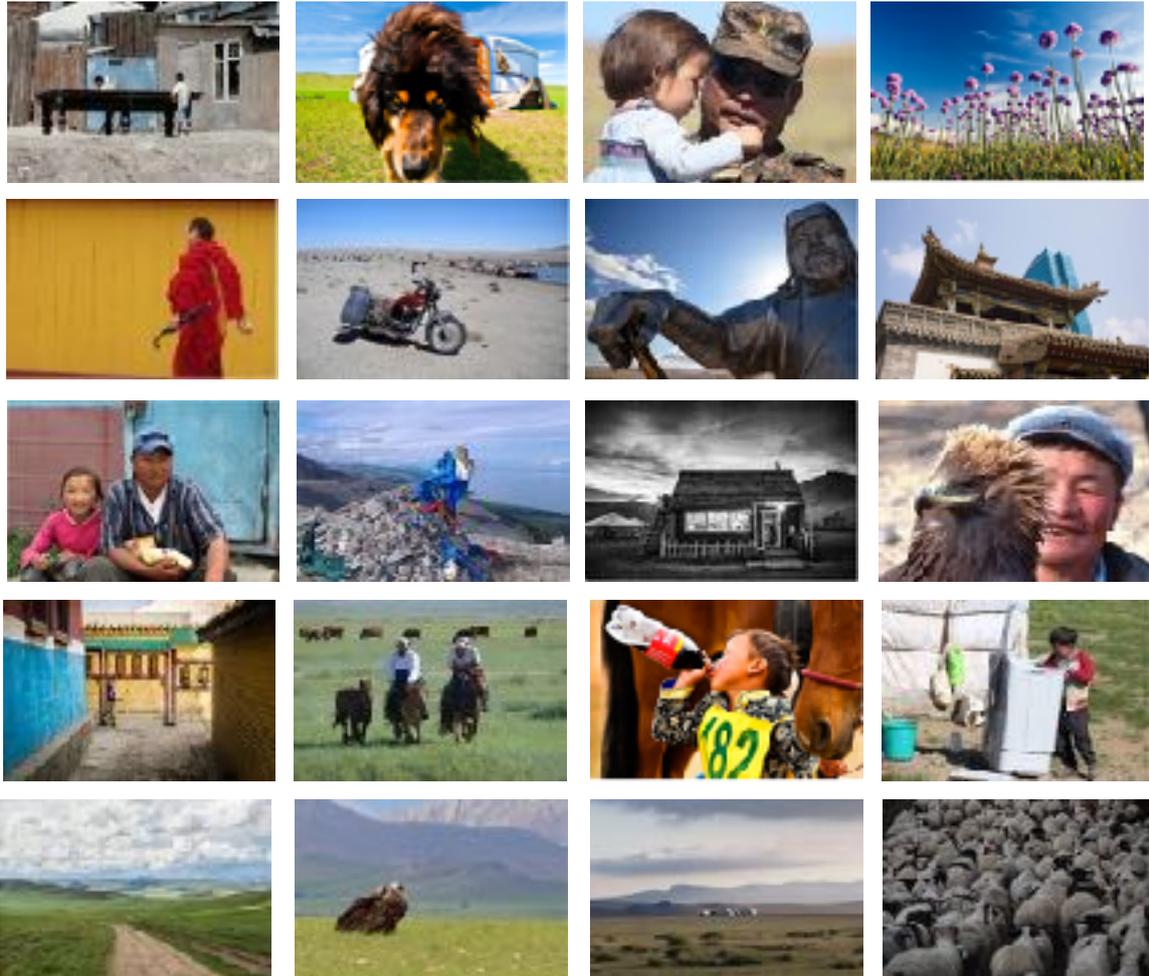


Mongolia is frequently depicted as a pristine untouched wilderness little changed since the time of Chinggis Khan. But this is not 21st Century Mongolia - this is stereotype or clichéd Mongolia. The traditional culture still remains but there is a drive for modernity and progress.

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. We're proud of the long-term local community partnerships we have formed with all spectrums of Mongolian society - from a philanthropist in Ulaanbaatar, to female Kazakh eagle huntresses and also the Tsaatan community. However, 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.

Don't come in search of what you term the authentic Mongolia. Discard the perceptions that perpetuate the stereotypes of Mongolia and aim for a more true encounter of real life. We ask you to ditch your preconceptions based on what you've read and watched. Instead come with an open mind and be challenged, surprised and often delighted.

Gobi Conservation and Research Expedition
June 6th - 16th 2020 - 11 Days



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 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 or Anne Camille Souris of Association Goviin Khulan.

We are always happy to be of help.