

# WILD WINTER KHOVSGOL



‘It remains a stand out adventure - remote, beautiful, free and with great interaction with the environment - including landscapes, animals and off course, the people. A true adventure, unlike any other. And it was possible thanks to the special way you built EL and tailored our trip.’

Ben Kidron, Khovsgol On Ice

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 Wild Winter Khovsgol In Brief



The wild and diverse landscapes of Khovsgol Nuur National Park dominate northern Mongolia and form the backdrop to this adventure which includes a three-day horse exploration of the lake by horse sleigh and the two-day Ice Festival. Biologists use the word ecotone for places where different habitats meet - where a forest meets a meadow or a lake meets a shore. Khovsgol is an ecotone on a very large scale. The result is a wide range of habitats - wet meadows, shallow ponds, coniferous forest, steppe woodland, open steppe, alpine meadow, high mountains and the lake and lakeshore. You'll get to experience all those different aspects of this remarkable area as we show you a more local and hidden side to Khovsgol.

This small group experience has been designed and put together by EL and Baasanchuluun a member of the Darkhad ethnic group and head of a young herding family located in the small community of Khatgal - on the southern shore of Khovsgol Lake. 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 each herder and their family, rather than disrupting their lives. 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.

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.

# Overview

## Khovsgol Nuur National Park

Day One & Two	Fly Murun I Khatgal I Horse trek	Bambakh's winter house	Feb 28 -300km on asphalt road	B/L/D
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Day Three - Five	Khovsgol Horse Sleigh Expedition	Accommodation provided by local families alongside lake	-	B/L/D
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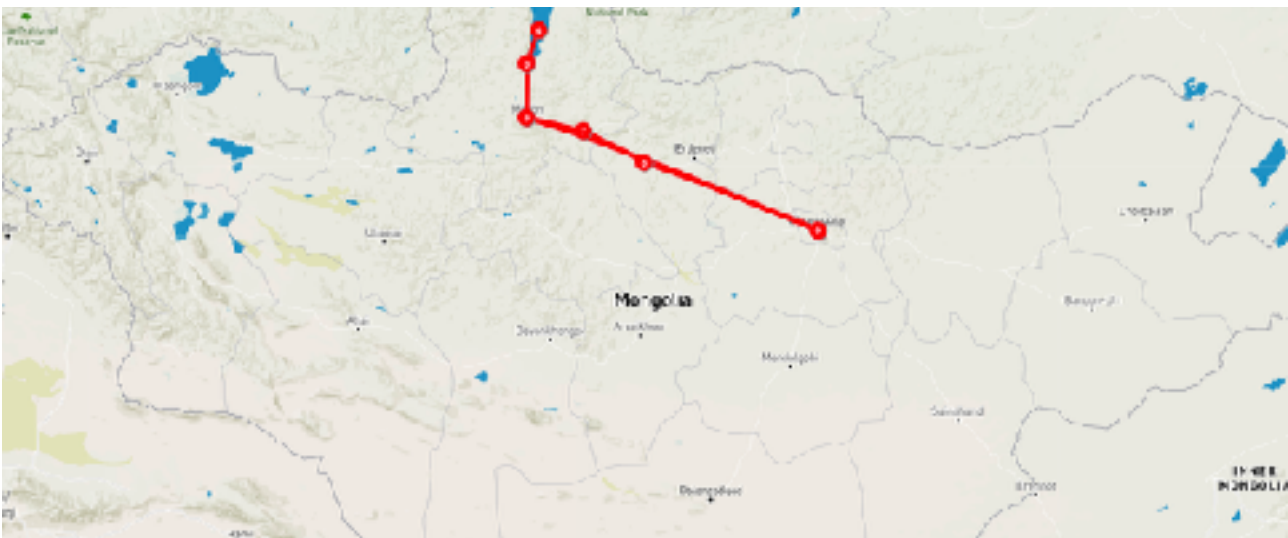
## Northern Landscapes

Day Six	Deer Stones I Murun	Provincial Hotel	350km on asphalt road	B/L/D
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Day Seven

## Ulaanbaatar

Day Eight	Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	300km on asphalt road	B/L
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## Day By Day

# Day One & Two

## Fly Murun | Khatgal | Horse Trek



Fly to Murun - the provincial capital of Khovsgol Aimag where you will meet your EL team and then travel to the small rural community of Khatgal - located on the southern shore of Khovsgol Nuur. At Khatgal you will be hosted by Basaanchuluu (Bambakh) - a modern 'malchin' (herder) in the region. As is common, he has a winter home within the town of Khatgal itself and this is where you will stay - in his wooden house within the hasha - typical fenced compound that belongs to each extended family.

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 experiencing the way of life in this small rural community.

We recommend a full-day horse trek in the company of Bambakh exploring the winter landscapes. For the horse sleigh trip you'll explore the lake. On the horse trek you'll head into the interior mountain and steppe landscapes meeting Bambakh's family and friends en-route.

But, if horse trekking is not your thing then there are hills to hike up within the town for remarkable views. Or, go for a spin on the ice with the EL drivers! Or, you can just relax and enjoy the gentle natural beauty of the area.

## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** A mattress on the floor of Bambakh's winter log house. Asian style long drop outside toilet. Hot shower available at 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:**
    - Day One - D \* other meals depending on flight time
    - Day Two - B/L/D
  - **Travel:** Day One - Up to one hour transfer to Chinggis Khan Airport and 100km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 3 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
  - **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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# Day Three - Five

## Khovsgol Nuur Horse Sleigh



Explore the frozen surface of Khovsgol Lake - the area of water that dominated Khovsgol Nuur National Park - Dalai Ej - Mother Sea to Mongolians. It is a spiritual place for Mongolians and its natural beauty makes it a stunning location to take a little time out.

Khovsgol is 126km in length and represents roughly 70% of Mongolia's fresh water and is the younger sister to Lake Baikal in Siberia and part of the same Rift System. If the sky is clear, you can stand on the shoreline and see the snowcapped Sayan Mountains - the border with Siberia. It is truly spectacular.



Meet Lokh. He is Bambakh's brother. And like Bambakh is a member of the Darkhad ethnic group and has lived in the Khovsgol region his whole life.

Together with Zorgio and our other local horse sleigh guides, they have hand built their horse sleighs in the local tradition - sleighs are a common form of transport for the Darkhad at Khovsgol in the winter months. These are the sleighs you will use.

Lokh, Zorgio and the other local herders will drive the sleighs. It is their local knowledge that will guide and lead the trip.

We leave the route entirely flexible and in the hands of your local guides as this leads to a more organic and Mongolian type of exploration. However, this does mean you need to be flexible as the route will also be dependent on the weather and also the conditions of the lake (see below).



We need you to be completely flexible. The route will depend on two things - one is the ice and the second the weather conditions. With this in mind, the route will at times remain close to shore and at other times be right in the centre of the lake. Also, rather than a day-long ride it might be broken up into shorter rides with stops at local families en-route for a picnic lunch and also to stretch the legs.

Challenges that need to be faced are mainly to do with the weather. The weather in March can be hard - bitter enough that your breath freezes in the air as you speak but this is all part of this remarkable experience. The wind can cause difficulties as it rushes through the 3 or 4 corridors that cross through the Khoridol Saridag limestone mountain range that dominates the western shoreline. Also, there might be compression crests. But these are all challenges that your local horse guides know to look out for and how to deal with.

We insulate the horse sleigh with our hand made traditional goat skin blankets. We also provide you with your own hand made full length goat skin del (traditional Mongolian coat) and a pair of Mongolian felt boots. Lunches are taken always with a small camp fire. Having these picnic lunches allows us to explore the sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, forested coves and the small cliffs that can be found alongside the lake.

Yes, there will be challenges but this style of experience provides a rare tranquility, The immensity of the lake and its landscapes are awe-inspiring. You'll find complete freedom as you fly over the ice listening to your sleigh guide singing traditional songs about horses and love. The ice is pure and transparent - virtually untouched - and you can lose hours of your day looking at the trapped air bubbles and being mesmerised by the colours.



## Logistics

- Accommodation: With local families
  - Meals: B/L/D
  - Travel: -
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# Day Six

## Murun



On your return to Murun on March 4 why not explore the Ushigiin Uver deer stones complex located close to the spectacular Delger Murun River. Known as Bugan Khoshoo in Mongolian they are believed to possibly be ancient grave markers for warrior chiefs.

Murun is the lively capital town of Khovsgol Aimag which bears the hallmarks of being a trading outpost close to the border with Russian Siberia, in that it is slightly wild and rough around the edges. However, this adds to its charm and unique atmosphere – especially the market in the centre of town.

## Logistics

- Accommodation: Provincial Hotel
  - Meals: B/L/D
  - Travel: Approximately 100km on asphalt road (roughly 3 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
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## Day Seven & Eight

### Selenge Gol | Bulgan | Ulaanbaatar



There's no other way back to UB apart from the road trip. But, don't spend your time thinking 'when will we get there?' You are already there surrounded by the beauty that is Mongolia in winter. Remove your watch and relax. These days are about the immensity of Mongolia's winter landscapes as you travel through Khovsgol and Bulgan Aimags.

You will also stop at the powerful Selenge River - formed by the confluence of the Ider and Delger rivers, the Selenge is Mongolia's principal river and a critical ground water source for Mongolia as well as the most substantial source of water for Lake Baikal in Siberia. Enjoy the spectacular views out over the river - stretching below the small town.

You'll spend one evening in Bulgan and arrive back into UB on March 6th.



## Logistics

- **Accommodation:**

- Day Seven: Provincial Hotel
- Day Eight: Your own choice of accommodation

- **Meals:**

- Day Seven: B/L/D
- Day Eight: B/L

- **Travel:**

- Day Seven - Approximately 300km on asphalt and dirt road (roughly 7 - 8 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
  - Day Eight - Approximately 350km on asphalt and dirt road (roughly 7 - 8 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
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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\$ 1800 pp + domestic flight of approximately 250,000 MNT
  - 3-4 Guests    US\$ 1480 pp + domestic flight of approximately 250,000 MNT
  - 5 Guests      US\$ 1395 pp + domestic flight of approximately 250,000 MNT
  - 6 Guests      US\$ 1255 pp + domestic flight of approximately 250,000 MNT
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- 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 :-)
  - Although carbon offsets are imperfect and not the whole answer, they make a difference. Emissions per kilometre for domestic flights are always much higher because such a large proportion of the flight is spent taking off and landing. With this in mind, as a company we will be calculating the offset for all domestic flights used by our guests and paying the offset price into the well-project fund that focuses on supporting Mongolia's herders ([http://www.camda.org.uk/Well\\_Project\\_Appeal.html](http://www.camda.org.uk/Well_Project_Appeal.html)).

## 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 In Winter

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. 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. Also, 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.

## 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. 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.

## 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 'mongolclokh' - 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.

## Our Local Long Term Community Partnerships

- We work with a network of local families throughout the country. These are long-term local partnerships we have built up over the 13 years+ we have been based here. These are also 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.
- BUT ... Guidebooks portray Mongolians as being warm and welcoming. They are. But they can also be stubborn, taciturn, reserved and very very indifferent. Yes, they can be welcoming but they really do not like displays of impatience, superiority, arrogance or anger and will make it known when they are not happy. They also rarely wear a watch let alone work to an agenda.
- BUT ... 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.
- BUT ... 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.
- **Yes, there will be tasks in which you can participate. But, you need to be proactive. Offer your time and help.**

## 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. 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. 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. 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 - Family Operated Ger Accommodation & Homestays

- As much as possible we use rural family operated ger accommodation. We prefer to support this local form of accommodation as it helps provide a supplementary income and extra financial security for them meaning they are one step further away from having to consider urban migration.
- These are all families we work in long-term local community partnership with - we NEVER turn up unannounced and we never just turn up to a herding family demanding accommodation.
- 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.
- 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! See below for more details on toilets and showers.
- 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. We try to get the right balance but during peak season please accept that you might see other westerners

### 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.

### Accommodation Winter

- Facilities will be more limited than you have maybe experienced on previous winter trips elsewhere.
- In towns, accommodation is heated through a central piping system which gets turned on in late September and turned off in May. You may find the rooms overly warm and stuffy but there is typically no thermostat so the only option is to open a window.
- Apart from in the towns, your accommodation will be in family provided accommodation where there won't be hot showers and the toilets will be OUTSIDE Asian style long drops. All family accommodation will be prepared for winter and heated by a stove but you're probably used to an insulated house with central heating. There is a substantial difference.

## 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.





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](mailto:jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk). I am always happy to be of help!**

*Jess*