

Altai and Eagles With Nauryz
March 13th 2021 - 11 Days

ALTAI AND EAGLES WITH NAURYZ



‘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 for the travel industry. 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.

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 - 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 15 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 Overview

Ulaanbaatar

March 13	Final arrival day Discover Ulaanbaatar City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch Welcome drink
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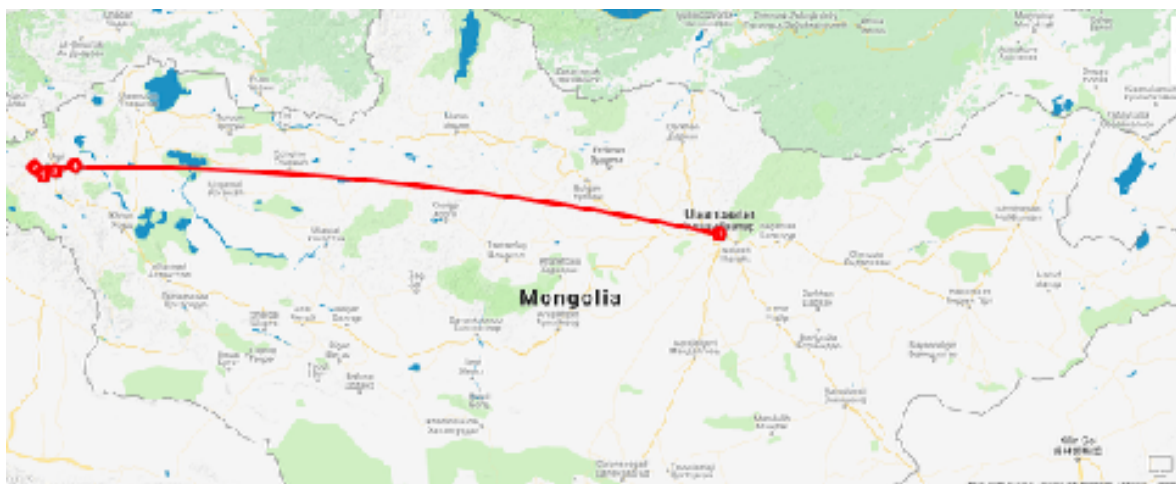
Altai

March 14 - 16	Fly Ulgii Ulaankhuus Kazakh eagle hunter homestay Option for horse trek	At the family home of your host Kazakh eagle hunter - with Bashakhan	March 14 - Transfer to airport, domestic flight and 40km on dirt road	D * other meals depending on flight time and B/L/D
March 17 - 19	Altai Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	At the family home of your host Kazakh eagle hunter - Asker	March 17 - 170km on dirt road	B/L/D
March 20 & 21	Deluun Nauryz Eagle Festival	At the family home of Jako's relatives	March 20 - 180km (ish) on dirt and asphalt oad	B/L/D
March 22	Ulgii Nauryz Kazakh embroidery lesson	At home of our Kazakh translator in Ulgii - Jako	160km on dirt & asphalt road	B/L/D

Ulaanbaatar

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 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.



Day To Day

Mar 13

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 Nогоон Нуур (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.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Of your own choice
 - Meals: Local lunch and welcome drink
 - Travel: Free transfer
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March 14 - 16

Fly Ulgii | Ulaankhuus | Kazakh Eagle Hunter Homestay



Fly out to Ulgii - the provincial capital of western Mongolia and transfer by road through the Altai landscapes to the small community of Ulaankhuus. In this river valley, the Kazakh eagle hunter Bashahan and his family have their winter home where you'll be warmly welcomed like old friends and you'll share their home with them.

You will notice that we don't detail what you will do on these 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 and more naturally Kazakh 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 Bashakhan or either of his adult sons - Tileukjan or Serikjan, both of whom are hunters - on a full-day horse trek. All still train and fly their eagles in March so you'll witness the close relationship and communication needed between hunter and eagle. We often have great picnic lunches outside in the sunshine which Bashakhan loves to attend.

And of course, you can spend time with the family experiencing their rural way of life and learning about the traditions and culture of the Kazakhs in Mongolia. Why not spend time with Bashakhan's wife and daughter-in-law - Hamalgan and Tolhyn - both are talented embroiders and will show you the skill behind this skilled tradition.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** A felt mat / mattress 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 and B/L/D
- **Travel:** Mar 14 - Up to one hour transfer to Chinggis Khan Airport and 60km on dirt road (approx 2 hours driving time not including stops). 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

March 17 - 19

Altai | Kazakh Eagle Hunter Homestay | Tolbo Nuur



Stop in Ulgii to have a hot shower at the local town shower house - just as each of the family members that host you do. Then transfer to through the Altai landscapes to the small community of Altai - in the south of Bayan Ulgii Province.



Altai is a remarkable location - deep on the Chinese border. Your destination is the summer pasture of Kazakh herder and eagle hunter Asker and his wife Ahgul. What makes staying with this family so special is that they have one son (Nargulan) and five daughters - Ahjakar, Ardagul, Aijarin, Jakarke and Aigerim. The oldest of which, together with Nargulan, are also training to eagle hunters. This delightful family will be your hosts as you spend time in the company of their son and daughters observing how they are learning from their father the skill and tradition of eagle hunting.



Don't try to find the location in a guidebook ... you won't. But, the lush alpine meadows, the open plains, the dense forests, the high snowy peaks and the crystal-clear rivers and lakes are worth the effort.



There is nothing planned on your arrival day as it depends what time you arrive. Also, everyone is different in what they like to do and not planing in advance leads to a more respectful experience. But there's plenty of flexibility and options including learning more about the way of life or even a great horse trek or full day hike into the landscapes of the interior in the company of Aigerim or one of her sisters.



You've probably heard of Aisholpan (the main star of the documentary *The Eagle Huntress*). However, you may not have heard of Aikerim or Ahkelik. They are also young eagle huntresses and have been training and hunting with their eagles as long as Aisholpan ... just they had no documentary made about them.

We are proud that we work with all three and their families. Yes, they are eagle hunters and the subject of many media images. But they are also young women who enjoy going to school and meeting with their friends. They are very sociable young women and like to meet people from other cultures and countries.

At EL all of our trip assistants (guides) are Mongolian women and we believe that seeing women in independent positions is surely one of the best ways to inspire younger girls within the rural communities of Mongolia - including the eagle huntresses - and to let them understand that they can do the same.

What I love is that eagle hunting has allowed both these young women to become courageous whilst at the same time teaching them the strength of perseverance as they continue to overcome obstacles such as centuries of tradition.

However, whether you get to meet them will depend on their schooling - schooling is important to their future and we like to support rather than impose. But, you'll be part of their household and therefore part of their daily life.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Homestay. A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house of the Asker family. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** March 17 - 170km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 6 hours driving time). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
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As Kazakh culture dictates, they are warm and generous hosts and this image shows the incredible table that awaits visitors at each home. 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.

Hunting With Eagles

The Kazakh eagle hunters only hunt in the winter months (early November through to February) as they hunt specifically for the winter coat of the prey of their eagles. We do not arrange contrived experiences where live prey is pre-captured, held and then released on purpose for our guests to be able to photograph the experience. We will never arrange any artificial experiences as they damage the culture, the way of life or wildlife itself.

For those concerned about the welfare of the eagles, the Kazakh eagle hunters have a respectful yet practical approach to their eagles – they have a close connection with their eagles – they are virtually family members although it is sometimes hard for outsiders to recognise this. The eagles are released back into the wild after about ten seasons so that they can breed. Once released, the birds are observed to make sure they successfully reintegrate back into the wild.

March 20 & 21

Nauryz Eagle Festival



Please note that the location of the Nauryz eagle festival has been changing over the past few years. It makes no difference to the trip - wherever it is located in 2021, we'll be there! However, your accommodation will change depending on the trip location.

Transfer by road to the small community of Deluun at the foothills of the Khokhserkhiin Nuruu. Here you'll stay with a local Kazakh family - relatives of Jako - our Kazakh translator.

It is here that the festival is held - 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.

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- **Accommodation:** A felt mat on the floor in the traditional clay house in Deluun community. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.



- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** March 20 - 180km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 4 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.

March 22

Nauryz | Ulgii



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.

Logistics

- **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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March 23

Ulaanbaatar



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.

Logistics

- **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 we offer a sliding price scale. We appreciate your holiday funds are precious and so the more people that book so the price comes down and everyone benefits.
- We appreciate our guests have been financially impacted by Covid-19 so for 2021, we are offering all our trips at our 2020 prices.

Group Size - Minimum of two. Maximum of six.

- 2 Guests US\$ 2825 pp + domestic flight of approximately 650,000 MNT pp
 - 3-4 Guests US\$ 2180 pp + domestic flight of approximately 650,000 MNT pp
 - 5 Guests US\$ 1895 pp + domestic flight of approximately 650,000 MNT pp
 - 6 Guests US\$ 1670 pp + domestic flight of approximately 650,000 MNT pp
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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).

Exclusions

Please be aware that our 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.



We provide detailed Pre Departure Guidelines but this is your 'quick (ish) glance' introduction to the EL travel style.

Why this section? We're 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 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.

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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 a better place, savour the gifts it offers and try to spend less time worrying about small issues that aren't being met - such as hot showers or lack of western toilets. Remember, Mongolians are living this life everyday through all seasons not just for a few weeks.

Mongolians are tough people and make living in their country look easy. But, Mongolia is not an easy option - tourism is still in its infancy so there is only a rudimentary tourist infrastructure in place. It's actually quite refreshing but will be challenging for you.

As Jack Weatherford writes in *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* - 'Compared to the difficulty of daily life for the herders, living permanently in those areas, ours were only the smallest of irritations.'

Any questions, queries or concerns? Just send them across to me at jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk. I am always happy to be of help!

Jess