

Central Heartland
5 Days + free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar

CENTRAL HEARTLAND

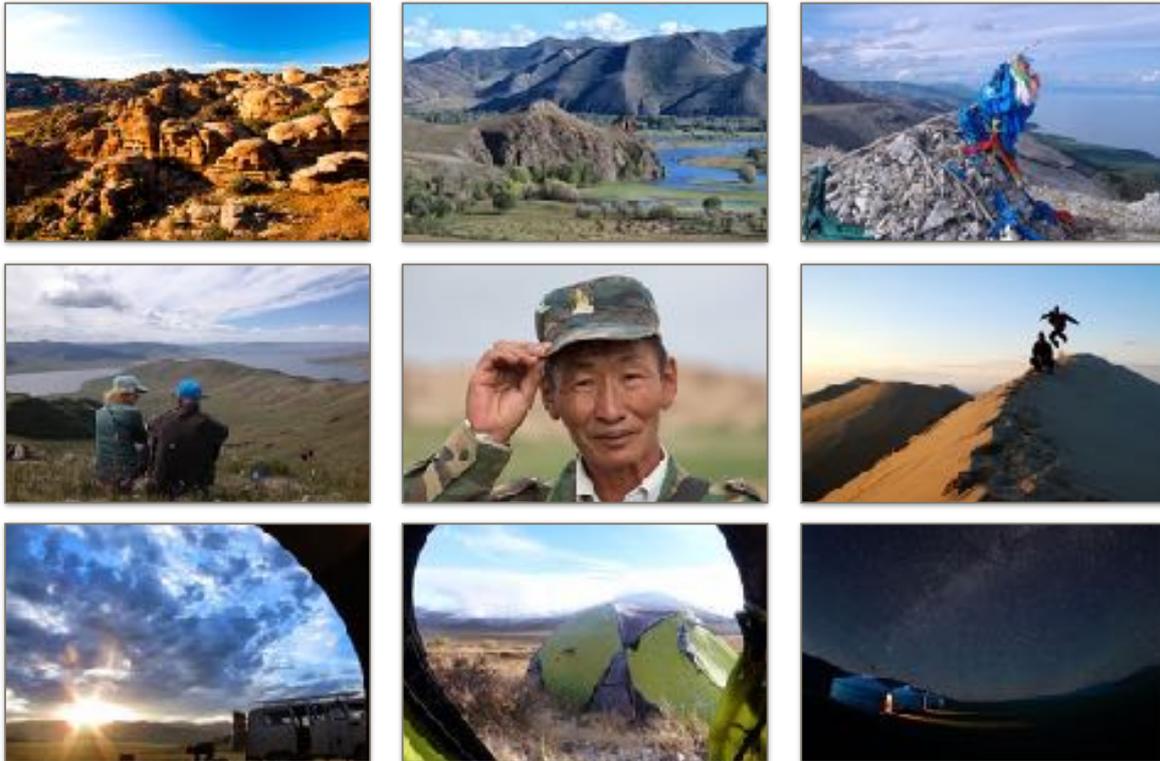


‘It is rare for me to be so satisfied across the board but you delivered what you promised and I like that. We got what we feel was a true Mongolian experience.’

Doug Tahirali, Tailor made experience

This is a customisable trip. It is adaptable, giving you the freedom to build a unique and personal trip for your chosen date. Upgrade your accommodation for all - or just part - of your trip, slow down the pace with few extra nights here and there or add a few more active adventures along the way. All images used throughout this document were taken either by EL guests or members of the EL team. This is the Mongolia that you will also experience.

Our Tailor Made Tours In Brief



Our tailor made trips are designed to provide you with the 'essence of Mongolia.' To give you an insight into the country and the variety of people and the diversity of the way of life in 21st Century Mongolia. We use the information you provide in your emails and bring our philosophy to create a flexible experience around what you're looking for.

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

Quick Overview

Date	Location	Accommodation	Travel	Meals provided/arranged by EL
Ulaanbaatar				
Date to suit you	City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch and welcome drink
Central Heartland				
Day One	Khustain Nuruu National Park Two-day horse trek	Private ger at herding family ger camp - with Batchuluun family	150km on dirt and asphalt road	L/D
Day Two	Khogno Khan Nature Reserve Elsen Tasarkhai Sand Dunes	Private ger at herding family ger camp - with Davaasuren family	255km on dirt & asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Three & Four	Kharkhorin Erdene Zuu Monastery Orkhon River Valley	Private ger next to herding family - with Tumee family	Day Four - 85km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L/D
Ulaanbaatar				
Day Five	Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	355km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L



Day By Day

Day to suit you

Discover Ulaanbataar | Free 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 Nogoos Nuur (Green Lake) community project - a community space created for the local population of the nearby Bayangol ger districts by Ulzii - a Mongolian philanthropist - 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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Day One

Khustain Nuruu National Park



Transfer to Khustain - one of Mongolia's conservation success stories - noted for its successful reintroduction of the endemic Przewalski horse- the only wild horse to survive in modern times and known as Takhi in Mongolian.

Khustain Nuruu National Park is 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.

Having arrived, visit the (recently updated) information centre located at the entrance to the park. Then, depending on your arrival time, explore the ridges with views over the distant Moltsoog Sands as well as the partly forested Khustai Mountains. Trek to 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

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Simple private ger at family ger camp (5-6 guest gers). Asian style sit down outside toilet . No showers.



Your host family (see below) are herders and migrate to different pastures with their livestock depending on the time of year.

In the winter months, Batchuluun and his family are located in the mountain foothills of the national park - protected from the harsh winter winds.

In the summer months, the family is located out on the broad and wide Tuul River Valley where the air circulates more freely and there is better grazing for their livestock.

The winter pasture is easier for independent exploration. The summer pasture is located in the middle of the long valley and requires transfers by vehicle to get you into the foothills of the park.

Both locations allow you to explore the archaeology of the region including the Neolithic graves of Öngüt (roughly from the 6th or 7th century A.D).

- **Meals:** L/D
 - **Travel:** Roughly 150km on asphalt and dirt road (approx 2.5 hours driving time not including stops and depending on city traffic). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
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Staying With Batchuluun



By staying with the Batchuluun family you are helping to support community based tourism within the Khustain region. The Bayansonginot Cooperative is a community based tourism organisation based in the buffer zone of Khustain Nuruu National Park. Herding families within the area have come together to focus on developing community based tourism as an alternative income generation as well as promoting the modern day herding way of life. The women members of the cooperative are treated as equals and attend the meetings and are also involved in the decision making. They also hand-produce felt items from their sheep herds - they do this for additional income as well as a sense of empowerment.

Our guests typically stay with Batchuluun - the head of the cooperative. Batchuluun offers additional guest gers for visitors to stay in. Batchuluun and his family typically move twice a year. In the winter they are nestled in the mountain valleys to the south of the national park and in the summer months they head into the wide and broad Tuul River Valley. If you wish to, both locations allow you to explore the archaeology of the region including the Neolithic graves of Öngüt (roughly from the 6th or 7th century A.D). This is a popular region for visitors so expect that there will be other international visitors staying at the camp.

Day Two

Khogno Khan Nature Reserve | Elsen Tasarkhan Sand Dunes



Khogno Khan is a sacred granite mountain within an area of secluded valleys, fresh water springs, open steppe and the Elsen Tasarkhai sand dunes. Khogno Khan Nature Reserve was taken under state protection partly due to the specialised taiga and steppe plants that grow in this area. The small but vital Tarna River provides an essential water source for the herders in the region.



One option is to explore the hidden interiors of the mountain on an easy 3-hour hike to the small working temple of Erdene Khambiin Khid and the ruined Ovgon Khiid Monastery. A birch bordered path leads to this location and offers one of the most beautiful panoramas of the region.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Basic ger at small family operated ger camp (4-6 guest gers). You will have to share a ger with 2-4 other members of the group. Asian style outside long drop toilet. No showers

Staying With The Davaasuren Family



At Khogno Khan, we work in long-term local community partnership with the Davaasuren family who have lived in the region their whole life. Using the guest ger accommodation that Davaasuren and his family provide allows you to experience their daily life side by side with them.

However, please understand though that as their way of life is simple, so are the facilities they provide. The family offer 4-6 guest gers alongside their own family ger.

The family keep a small number of livestock - including horses & camels. They are a quiet couple who are always happy to welcome guests. They are located in an idyllic spot at the foot of the Elsen Tasarkhai sand dunes where they live all year round. This really is location, location, location.

- **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Roughly 200km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 6 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
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Day Three & Four

Orkhon River Valley | Kharhorin | Erdene Zuu Monastery



Continue to the home of Tumee and Jargaa - a herding family we work with as part of one of our long-term local community partnerships. They are modern-day herders, a strong part of the local community and move up to six times a year - always located close to the Orkhon River.



The Orkhon River Valley is one of Mongolia's four UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It's a cultural WHS and represents the evolution of nomadic pastoral traditions in Mongolia - this region is considered the cradle of Mongolian civilisation and an area rich in nomadic life as the Orkhon River provides as essential lifeline for nomads and their livestock.



Tumee & Jargaa live a short distance from Kharkhorin which you can combine with your visit. Kharkhorin is the ancient capital of Ogodei Khan and the Mongol Empire in the 13th Century. Visit Erdene Zuu - Mongolia's oldest monastery and visit the excellent Kharkhorin Museum with its clear and updated exhibits based on the history surrounding the Orkhon River Valley and the Turkish and Mongol Empire. Even if history doesn't really 'grab' you, we recommend a visit as it helps to bring the history of the area alive.

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Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Basic ger next to family ger. Basic long drop outside toilet and no showers. 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

Staying With The Tumeer Family



As with all the families we work with, we work in long-term local community partnership with Tumeer and Jargal. Local to the area - they both went to school in the region - one of their adult sons is a member of the Genghis Khan Polo Club. They are considered integral members of their local community. Although they agree their way of life has challenges, they love it for the sense of freedom it provides.

- **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Day Three - Roughly 85km on dirt and asphalt road. Approx 2 hours driving time not including stops. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual
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Day Five

Ulaanbaatar



Return back to UB where we'll transfer you to your accommodation and the rest of the day will be yours to create your own experience.

Remember you could use our UB guide to help you to explore the urban side of Mongolian life in downtown Ulaanbaatar. Alternatively, one of our trip assistants could be made available but please let me know in advance.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Of your own choice
 - Meals: B/L
 - Travel: 355km on asphalt and dirt road (approx 6-8 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual.
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Pricing And Group Size

- For all of our 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.
- If you are travelling with children, let us know their ages as we do offer free experiences for children under 15 excluding certain costs.
- Maximum of 4 guests per vehicle.

Group Size - Minimum of two. Maximum of six.

- 2 Guests US\$ 1125 pp
- 3-5 Guests US\$ 920 pp
- 6 Guests US\$ 840 pp

Where Does Your Payment Go?

- In our experience, how people choose who to book with usually comes down to the cost. Budget is a very personal thing and everyone is different in what they want to pay.
- We're a registered Mongolian business and registered social entrepreneurship. We are not a luxury tour operator. We're a small business that receives around 100-150 bookings per year. We can't compete on price with our budget competition that don't pay sustainable wages, or with the international companies that use agencies to run their trips and receive 1000s of bookings per year. We also can't compete with unregulated individual guides or drivers that offer cut-price trips.
- To help you see where your payment goes, we're very much driven by our philosophy of making a positive difference in Mongolia through tourism. Your payment remains in Mongolia and goes back into the communities through which you travel. We are also a member of Tourism Declares A Climate Emergency - a collective of travel organisations who have declared a climate emergency and are coming together to find solutions. We accept our responsibility to tell the truth, work together, and help build a new, regenerative tourism.
- We focus on community-based tourism - working directly with local people and communities - slowly building up relationships and what we call long-term local community partnerships with them. We work side by side with each family and look at ways we can support them.
- We also run our free long-term training school for Mongolian women that want to work in tourism but don't have the skills or knowledge to do so. We provide free training and then create long-term employment opportunities for them.

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.



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 its 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

English speaking 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 free long-term training, development and employment 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. 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. 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 - 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 - Tourist Ger Camps

- If requested and in some locations (such as Khovsgol), we do offer accommodation at ger camps. We don't book the most luxurious or the most exclusive. Instead, we choose the ones that we think work best for you and your style of trip as well as the locations you are visiting.
- There **WILL** be times during your journey when the availability of certain amenities at these ger camps may be lacking. The reasons for this can be varied - low season; high season; electricity/generator problems; remote locations; the simple fact that some amenities are only catered for between certain times of the day. Examples of this could be a ger camp having a lack of hot water, or only having hot water at certain times.
- Lighting in the evening at some places may be by candle-light, and electricity may not be available.
- **Also be prepared for noise - especially if it is in the busy summer season. Not just from the large tour groups that use the ger camps but also from staff members that often congregate in the evenings, the noise of generators when used and also from the parking area ... where drivers head to carry out mechanics and to meet other driver friends they haven't seen in a while. Not all ger camps will be the peaceful idyll you may expect.**

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 - 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.

