

Living With The Tsaatan
13 Days & option of free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar

LIVING WITH THE TSAATAN



'I was blown away by the variety of the scenery and the people. The highlights of the trip were the friendliness of the staff, the interactions with herders as people and friends and feeling part of the country.'

John Highley

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 Living With The Tsaatan In Brief



Located in the far north of Mongolia, the Darhad Depression is a broad expanse of open steppe and low forested hills and home to several thousand square kilometres of natural habitat classified as taiga (also known as the boreal forest). This vast region is Tsagaan Nuur, and as well as forming the northernmost tip of Mongolia, it provides the home range for the world's southern-most indigenous reindeer population.

The Tsaatan are Mongolia's smallest ethnic minority - a community of nomadic reindeer herders with strong shamanist beliefs. Originally from Tuva in Siberia, they have historically inhabited the border region of Russia and Mongolia. Ethnically, the community identifies as Dukha, but their lifestyle as reindeer herders earned them the Mongolian name Tsaatan, which means roughly 'with reindeer.'

This winter experience allows you to live alongside the Tsaatan. However, this is not an 'organised tour.' Apart from the road trip to access the taiga, it is a journey on which you must be prepared to step outside your comfort zone. During your time with the Tsaatan, nothing is contrived or planned. We leave the plan each day entirely flexible and in the hands of your host family. This leads to a more respectful and genuine experience as well as a more personal and real insight for you as our guest. To do this though you must be open to all experiences and also able to appreciate life, whatever the conditions. If you're able to travel in this way, rather than just a standard organised tour you'll get an original insider experience of the day to day life and the challenges faced by the Tsaatan themselves.

Quick Overview

Date	Location	Accommodation	Travel	Meals provided/arranged by EL
Ulaanbaatar				
Day to suit you	Discover Ulaanbaatar City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch and welcome drink
Northern Landscapes				
Day One	Amarbayasgalant Monastery	Ger at family operated ger camp - with Davisuren family	385km on dirt and asphalt road	L/D
Day Two	Uran Togoo Volcano Khutag Undur	Local Hotel	325km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Three	Selenge Gol Murun	Provincial Hotel OR Ger Camp (TBC)	200km on dirt road	B/L/D
Day Four	Deer Stones Ulaan Uul	With Narankhuu herding family	280km on dirt road	B/L/D
Day Five - Ten	Tsaatan Trek	With Tsaatan family (with Narankhuu on Day Ten)	-	B/L/D
Day Eleven	Murun	Provincial Hotel	280km on asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Twelve	Erdenet	Provincial Hotel	400km on asphalt road	B/L/D
Ulaanbaatar				
Day Thirteen	Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	335km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L



Online map - https://www.tripline.net/trip/Living_With_The_Tsaatan_Winter_-_Mongolian_13_Days_Tailor_Made_Experience-25527245274710178F06E4FB390F4BE0

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

Day to suit you

Final Arrival Day | Discover Ulaanbaatar | City Walking Tour



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

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

Our informal and relaxed city walking tour will give you a contrasting insight into a way of life, compared to that of the rural population. This day is not about museums or shopping – it's about getting out and about and exploring and discovering.

Today you'll spend the day in the company of one of my female Mongolian trip assistants. The day will include Nogoön Nuur (Green Lake) community project - a community space created for the local population of the nearby Bayangol ger districts by Ulzii - a Mongolian philanthropist - as well as other areas of the city including Gandan Monastery.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Of your own choice
 - Meals: Local lunch and welcome drink
 - Travel: Free transfer and short drives only
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Day One

Amarbayasgalant Monastery



A road trip to Amarbayasgalant Monastery - passing through some of Mongolia's main agricultural land.

The monastery - where the remains of Zanabazar - Mongolia's first Living Buddha (spiritual head of state) - are interred - was constructed between 1726 - 1736, when Mongolia was under heavy Manchu influence and this influence can be seen today. By the early 1890's Amarbayasgalant was one of the greatest pilgrimage destinations in Mongolia.



It is situated in a haven of rugged beauty in the cul-de-sac of a long, deep valley backed by Mount Buren-Khaan against which the monastery is built. The valley is well-watered by the Iver River and has long provided an essential water source for nomadic herders and their livestock.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Basic ger at small family operated ger camp (3 gers). Asian style outside long drop toilet. No showers

Staying With Davisuren Family



At Amarbaysagalant we work with Davisuren. She is a grandmother who's son is a herder out in the Iver Valley. She lives in a small house located close to the monastery and has a small shop that the young monks and local community members use. Davaasuren offers two gers for visitors to stay in. Her way of life is basic and so is the ger accommodation she offers. But the location is fantastic - next to the monastery which means you are free to explore the monastery and it's stunning surroundings independently without any need for a vehicle.

- Meals: L/D
 - Travel: Roughly 385km on dirt and asphalt road. Approx 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.
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Day Two

Uran Togoo Volcano | Khutag Undur



Spend time at the monastery and then depart for Uran Togoo - Tulga Uul - a national protected area consisting of the extinct volcanoes of Uran Togoo, Tulga, Togoo, and Jalavch Uul. All four mountain names allude to their volcanic past with designations borrowed from around the fireplace - a bowl shape, three mounds reminding of the traditional iron tripod kettle support and a small pot.



They are part of the Khanuy-Gol Volcanic Field which has 10 cones with heights of 30–190 metres from the Pleistocene and Holocene epochs.

Having visited, you will continue to the small community of Khutag Undur where you will spend one evening.

Logistics

- Accommodation: Local Hotel
 - Meals: B/L/D
 - Travel: Roughly 325km on dirt and asphalt road. Approx 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.
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Day Three

Selenge Gol | Murun



Continue on to Murun - the lively capital town of Khovsgol Province 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 bustling market in the centre of town.

En-route 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.



Logistics

- Accommodation: Provincial Hotel
 - Meals: B/L/D
 - Travel: Roughly 200km on asphalt road. Approx 5-6 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.
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Day Four

Deer Stones | Ulaan Uul



First 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.

Then start the transfer to Ulaan Uul a district of Khovsgol aimag located deep within the Darkhad Depression. The depression is about 150 km long and 40 km wide, and is surrounded by high mountains. The depression receives water from many montane rivers and is thus rich in wetlands and lakes. These are surrounded by diverse habitats, including dry steppe, boreal forest (taiga) and alpine vegetation. The land is used as pasture for livestock.



Narankhuu is a member of the Darkhad ethnic group and he will be your host for your trek into the taiga. He is also a herder - moving seasonally through his pastures and you will spend tonight at the winter herding pasture of Narankhuu and his family.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Ger alongside herding family. Asian style long drop toilet (outside) and no showers
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Roughly 280km on asphalt and dirt road one way (approx 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.
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Day Five - Ten

Tsaatan Trek



The Tsaatan (also known as Dukha) are Mongolia's smallest ethnic minority. There are two main areas where the Tsaatan community live and herd reindeer called the East and West Taiga. Though the regions are geographically distinct, the two groups share many kinship ties and are part of the same wider community.

The trek will allow you to witness and experience the lives, culture and traditions of the Tsaatan but the final route to and from the taiga will depend on the location of the Tsaatan families. It might take one or two full riding days until you come to a Tsaatan camp. You are expected to remain flexible throughout the trek as conditions on the ground change from day-to-day and will impact on the route of the trek.

Once you arrive, Tsaatan life being as it is, it is impossible to make a plan or even try to announce a prospective programme. To operate this way is not part of the Tsaatan culture.

Instead, you become part of family life as you stay alongside local families experiencing their everyday way of life.

Our Tsaatan Treks

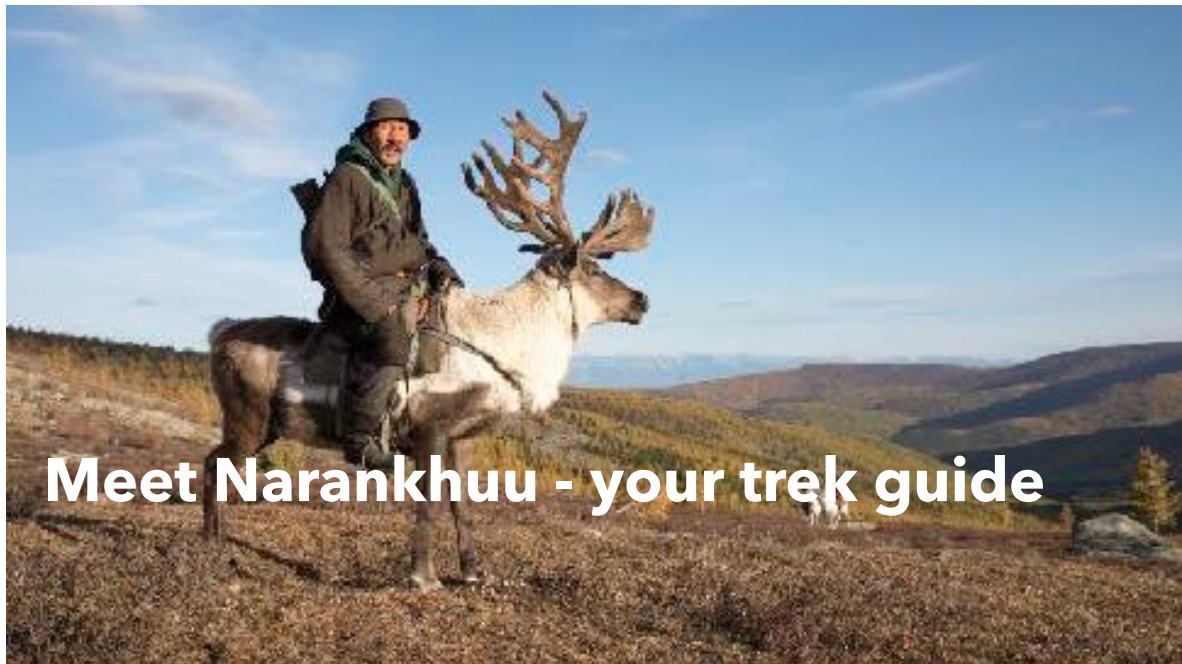
A major part of the philosophy that drives us is to 'support local' - local culture, people, communities and environment. For our treks into the taiga we work with two distinct ethnic groups - the Darkhad and Tsaatan / Duka. By combining the itinerary like this, we get to spread our support further. Also, as a visitor, you get to experience two distinct ways of life.

The Tsaatan community were supported through the TCVC - Tsaatan Community Visitors Centre based in Tsagaan Nuur - although this organisation has closed due to lack of support. However, we make sure we follow the guidelines set out originally by the Tsaatan Community and Visitors Centre - making sure our visits to the Tsaatan community are of benefit to all. Although you will have a Darkhad guide, we make sure that your visit to the Tsaatan benefits them financially but respectfully and culturally as well. The Tsaatan are strongly tribal and have a unique way of interacting with the outside world. We will work hard to make sure your visit is not considered intrusive by the Tsaatan into their private lives.

The Tsaatan have encountered many westerners before. They are not an undiscovered tribe and you will not be the first or last person they have hosted. They are a modern people who have welcomed visitors from all over the world, and confront many of the same challenges as the rest of the modern world, including the need to earn an adequate income. In recent years, they have complained of feeling exploited for tourism purposes and they are starting to feel taken advantage of. We will be working with a guide from the Darkhad tribe that knows most Tsaatan families intimately - everything you do will be led by him.

As our guests we ask that you remember that the taiga is not a tourist camp but rather the home of an active, thriving community that wishes to sustain their way of life within a sensitive ecosystem. If your expectation is to be entertained or to have luxurious accommodations, the taiga is not the place for you.

From our own side, we don't offer set-date group departures to the Tsaatan as we feel this creates too much of an environmental and cultural impact. Typically we only arrange one or two private trips per year for groups of less than four. We pay a fair and sustainable price for all accommodation provided by the Tsaatan. We do not ask the individual families to provide meals using their limited resources. Your trip assistant will prepare meals herself for you but we will share our food with the Tsaatan families. Any visits to a shaman are conducted only on days marked in the Mongolian Lunar Calendar when shamans would be conducting a ceremony. To do so outside of these days, would be a contrived experience.



Narankhuu is a member of the Darkhad ethnic group and makes his home in the Darkhad Depression. He is intimately familiar with the routes, history, and people of the Taiga - he has been leading treks here for the whole of his adult life. Sometimes his younger son joins him. You may wonder why a young man is joining you. - see him as an apprentice.

One of our way of supporting the local families we work with is by allowing them to bring their sons or daughters as helpers on the treks. It helps to create a space where traditional Mongolian knowledge can be passed from older to younger generations, as it always has been. This helps keep it alive, in a real, breathing way for the future.

Younger Mongolians come with their fathers or brothers and start off learning to load horses and getting to know the routes, water sources, place names and the stories of the land.



You will be going into some of the most remote landscapes in Mongolia. As a result, this is a vigorous expedition which requires you to be fit, healthy and prepared to rough it. Expect to be sore and challenged at times!

Equipment

You will ride on Russian saddles (or a similar Mongolian version with felt saddle pads providing support and comfort under the saddle). These are provided by the herders themselves so will change in style from herder to herder. We don't import western style saddles as a) it's a faff and b) the horses aren't used to them. The stirrups have 'character' - they'll be more basic than you're used to but have a wide step. The bridles are basically similar to what you might have used in the past. The herders look after the horses and help with saddling up, but you are welcome to help.

For what to bring, we provide a detailed 'what to pack' list on booking.

Safety

Bring a helmet with you - they'll be of a better standard than is currently available in Mongolia. Your trip assistant is trained in basic first aid through the Mongolian Red Cross and there's a medical kit. But, to a large degree you must be responsible for your own safety while riding. We provide safety guidelines for our riding trips with a few hints and tips on how to make the most of your Mongolian horse riding experience.

Pace and Experience

It is difficult to describe a typical day, as they vary so much. How far you horse trek for on each day will depend on the location of the Tsaatan families. You can expect on average to trek anywhere from 1-8 hours depending on the distance of the camps, weather and trail conditions, as well as the pace set by your guide. Riding will be in open and wooded terrain, almost entirely at a walking pace due to the uneven ground underfoot.

The movement of the herds and herders is determined by the seasonal availability of resources and weather. Typically, around mid-June, herding families move to summer camps at higher altitudes where there are open grasslands, fewer insects and cooler temperatures. In September, the families move to autumn pastures at lower altitudes, where young male reindeer, selected as riding or pack animals, are castrated before mating starts in late September/early October.

Horses

The stars of the show! The horses themselves are a little like the herder guides / horse wranglers you would travel with - self-sufficient and tough. They're small - but strong and resilient. Ponies they are not. The Mongolian horse spends much of its year roaming in the hills - in territorial, almost semi-wild herds. They're a joy to ride ... but just take a little time to understand their character. They're as much part of the experience as the trek itself.

Accommodation



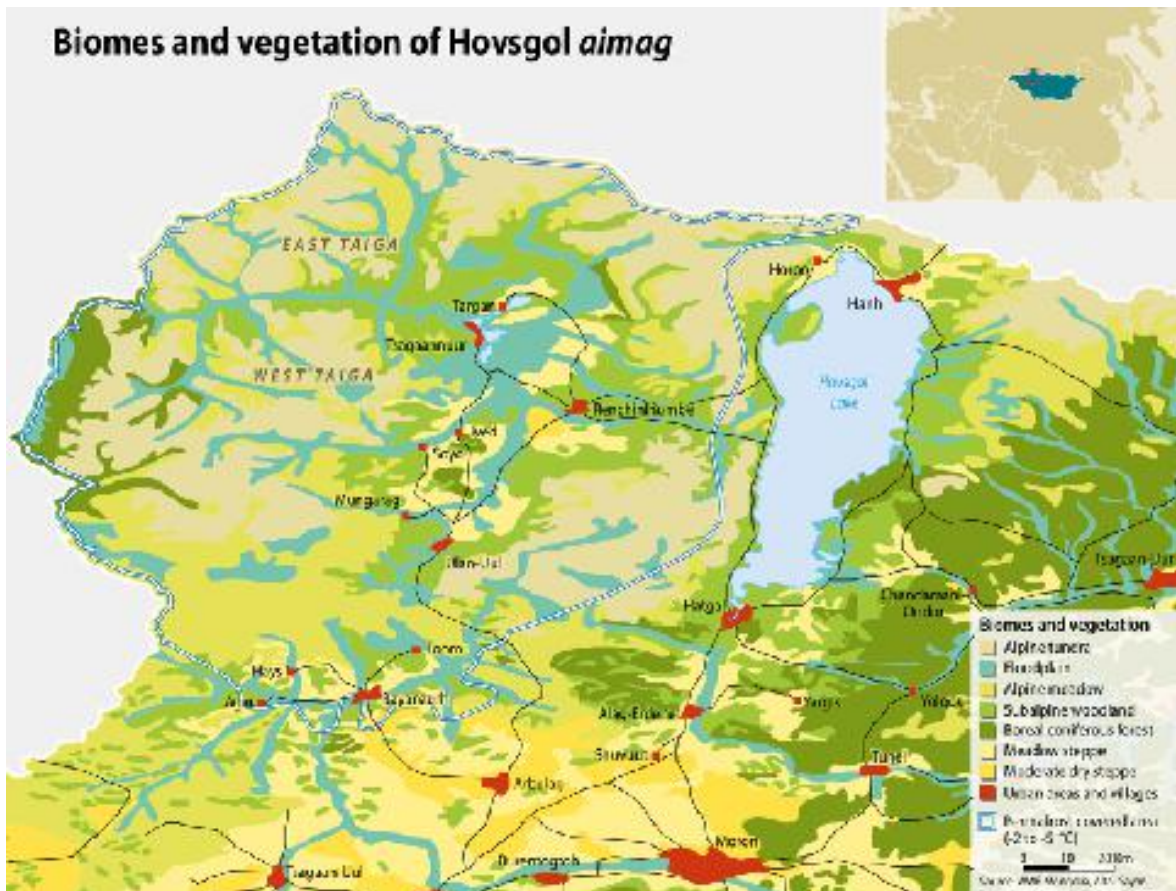
En-route to and from the taiga, it will mainly be wild camping - we provide a kitchen tent, a toilet tent and VANGO tents. There are no single supplements - each traveller gets their OWN tent. In winter, you stay with local families.

During the days you will spend in the taiga, your accommodation will be basic as the life of the Tsaatan is basic. We do not try to change the Tsaatan or their way of life for our own benefit or comfort. Reindeer herders live in canvas tents called ortz. You may sleep in a separate ortz provided by the family or you may sleep in the family home. In this circumstance, you will more than likely have to sleep on the floor on your Thermorest.

You may find that you will only visit one family as your time will be limited. It also depends on the location of their pasture.

There won't be hot showers and the toilets will be outside Asian style long drops. The 'ort' will be insulated but you're probably used to an insulated house with central heating. There is a substantial difference.

During the trek there will be no access to electricity (this is a pack-horse supported trek and the tour vehicle will wait back at Narankhuu's ger). You must bring either a solar charger or extra charged batteries.



Day Eleven - Thirteen

Murun | Erdenet | 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'll spend one evening in Murun and the second in the city of Erdenet. Are either locations considered a highlight of Mongolia by the guidebook writers? No! But staying here will give you an understanding as to the way of life of Mongolia's small town inhabitants. It also brings money and support into the local communities.



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:
 - Day Eleven & Twelve: Provincial Hotel
 - Day Thirteen: Your own choice of accommodation
 - Meals: B/L/D
 - Travel:
 - Day Eleven - Roughly 280km on asphalt and dirt road one way (approx 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.
 - Day Twelve - Roughly 400km on asphalt and dirt road one way (approx 8 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.
 - Day Thirteen - Roughly 335km on asphalt and dirt road one way (approx 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.
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Pricing And Group Size

- For all of our low season experiences 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 with **discounts available for children (get in touch for details)**. In addition, 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 four. Minimum of two required for a guaranteed departure or pay a surcharge for one traveller.

- 2 Guests US\$ 2545 pp
- 3 Guests. US\$ 1970 pp
- 4 Guests US\$ 1680 pp
- The above prices include a 15% discount pp as a thank you for choosing to travel with EL outside of the main season. We are keen to extend the season for the benefit of our Mongolian team and the rural families and Mongolian businesses we work with - to make tourism less concentrated around peak season (July) and to help the income of the people we work with be more evenly distributed. Thank you for being part of that :-)

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 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 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. 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.

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. I am always happy to be of help!

Jess