

Altai & Eagles Sagsai  
13 Days

# ALTAI & EAGLES

(WITH EAGLE FESTIVAL)



‘EL had so much knowledge of the country, the culture and its people, and really seemed to get us much 'closer' than other companies. It was truly an enlightening experience. It was an experience like no other. It was so interesting to see a different way of life and be in an environment so different from our every day.’

**Justine Leong, Altai and Eagles**

This is a small group trip. However, our maximum group size is six - which is refreshingly small. These small group sizes mean that our trips are more respectful for your host families that we work in long-term local community partnerships with. It also means you'll be one of few rather than one of many and this leads to a more genuine experience as well as a more personal and real insight for you as our guest.

It also means that no two trips are ever the same as we can keep things flexible. 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 Altai and Eagles in Brief



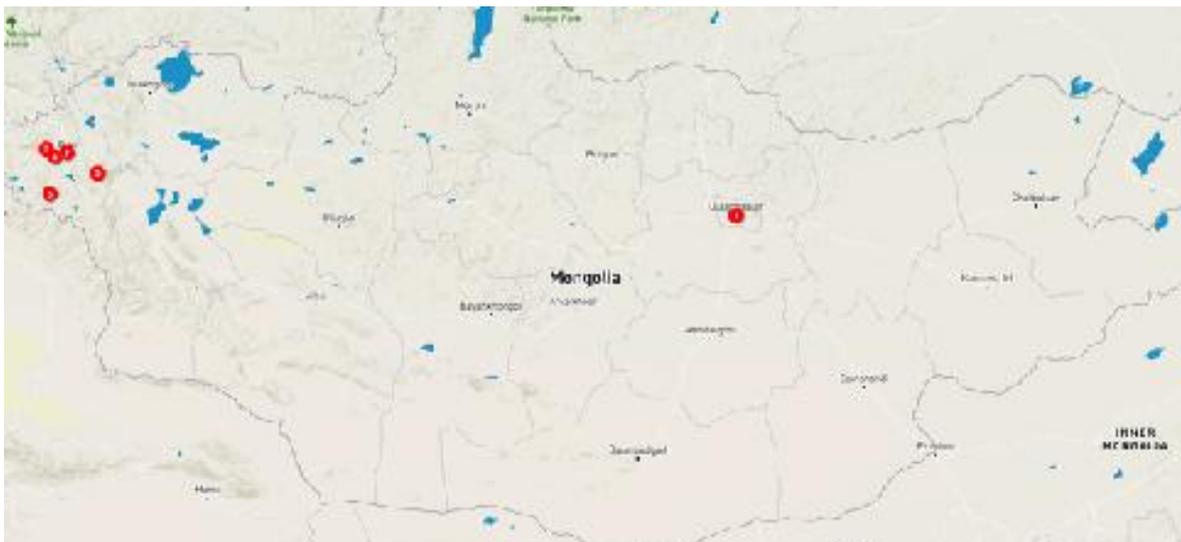
The wild landscapes of western Mongolia form the stunning backdrop to this cultural adventure. The Kazakhs are Mongolia's largest ethnic group with over 100,000 residing in western Mongolia. A percentage of Kazakhs are eagle hunters. Amid arid yet strikingly beautiful landscapes the hunters have a way of life that has been shaped by history, geography and political change.

This adventure provides a great opportunity to experience first hand the life of a Kazakh eagle hunter as you spend time living alongside hunters and their families witnessing their daily lives and the preparations for the Eagle Festival which you will attend. The festival is 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, herders and the Kazakh hunters.

On this experience you will be hosted by some of the region's most experienced and respected hunters and you will learn skills and history from them as well as explore the stark yet beautiful landscapes of Mongolia's Altai. 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 and supports each family, 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.

## Quick Overview

Date	Location	Accommodation	Travel	Meals provided/ arranged by EL
<b>Ulaanbaatar</b>				
Day One	Final Arrival Day   Discover Ulaanbaatar   City Walking Tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local lunch   Welcome drink
<b>Altai</b>				
Day Two & Three	Fly Khovd Or Ulgii   Tsambagarav   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay   Option for full-day trek	At home of Kazakh family - with Dakhar family	Day 2 - One hour transfer time Chinggis Khan airport and 120km on dirt road	Day 2 - D *other meals depending on flight time Day 3 - B/L/D
Day Four & Five	Ulaankhuus   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	At home of eagle hunter - with Bashakhan family	Day 4 - 180km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Six & Seven	Sagsai   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	At home of eagle hunter - with Sailaukhan family	Day 6 - 60km on dirt road	B/L/D
Day Eight & Nine	Eagle Festival	At home of eagle hunter - with Tastulek family	Day 8 - 120km on dirt road Day 9 - short drives	B/L/D
Day Ten & Eleven	Altai   Kazakh eagle hunter homestay	At home of eagle hunter - with Asker family	Day 10 - 130km on asphalt & dirt road	B/L/D
Day Twelve (Contingency Day)	Ulgii   Embroidery lesson with Halmira	At family home of our Kazakh translator - with Jako & family	60km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L/D
<b>Ulaanbaatar</b>				
Day Thirteen	Fly Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	Up to 220km to Khovd OR Ulgii Airport   Up to one hour transfer time Chinggis Khan airport	B * other meals depending on flight time



Online Map - [https://www.tripline.net/trip/Altai\\_And\\_Eagles\\_-\\_September\\_11\\_%2B\\_25\\_2021-1431021313141011B644B758ADF54101](https://www.tripline.net/trip/Altai_And_Eagles_-_September_11_%2B_25_2021-1431021313141011B644B758ADF54101)

## Day By Day

# Day One

### 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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## Day Two & Three

### Tsambagarav Uul National Park



Fly into Khovd or Ulgii and transfer by road through the Altai landscapes to Tsambagarav Mountain. Tsambagarav Uul National Park stands high above the provincial borders of Khovd and Bayan-Olgii aimag and forms part of the Mongol Altai Mountain Range. The 4208m peak that the national park is named after is one of Mongolia's most beautiful snow-capped mountains and surrounded by wild open valleys - it is a stunning setting.

Here you'll stay with the Dakhar family - a Kazakh family that make their home at the foot of Tsambagarav Mountain. There's nothing pre-planned in the itinerary - we let the plan unfold once you're in place.

## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Dakhar does not have an additional ger for guests to stay in so you are invited to sleep in the family ger. Don't expect a bed - more a felt mat on the floor of the ger as is typical for Kazakh families. However, if you prefer privacy, we always provide tents for each guest and these can be put up next to the family home. Asian style long drop outside toilet. No showers.

## Staying With The Dakar Family



The Dakar family are an extended Kazakh herding family making their life amongst the foothills of Tsambagarav. Like most herding families they move 2-4 times a year and in the autumn live close to the base of the mountain. We like to work with them as it helps to provide financial support that enables them to retain their way of life. Also, their local knowledge of the region is unparalleled. It also gives our guest a different perspective of the way of life in western Mongolia.

- **Meals:** Day Two - D \* other meals depend on flight time. Day Three - B/L/D
  - **Travel:** Day Two - Up to one hour transfer time from Chinggis Airport and then roughly 120km total on asphalt and dirt road (approx 3 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.
  - **Flight Departure and Arrival Time TBC.** Weight restriction 15kg (10kg check-in and 5kg hand luggage). Hand luggage 'officially' restricted to 1-piece. Excess baggage charges are between \$4-\$7 per kilo depending on the route. Please note that the domestic airline may change the flight time schedule closer to the day of departure
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## Day Four & Five

### Ulaankhuus | Kazakh Eagle Hunter Homestay



Transfer to outside the small community of Ulaankhuus. In this river valley, the Kazakh eagle hunter Bashakhan 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.

Hunting with golden eagles ('berkutchi') is a form of falconry traditionally found throughout the Eurasian steppe that takes place from late October through to February and is still practiced by the Kazakhs of western Mongolia including Bashakhan and his adult sons - Tileukjan or Serikjan. However, although hunting will not be possible in September you will still be able to experience them training their eagles so you'll witness the close relationship and communication needed between hunter and eagle.

We highly recommend a full-day horse trek to experience the landscapes. 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 ancient tradition.



## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** We need you to be flexible in the Altai this close to the Eagle Festival as accommodation is limited in the region. By September, Bashakhan is usually back in his winter clay house but may provide an additional ger but this depends on the weather. At times, other companies may also be staying there but Bashakhan always provides a private room within the house for EL guests. Alternatively, if you prefer privacy, we always provide tents for each guest and these can be put up next to the family home. Asian style long drop outside toilet. Hot shower available at the local town shower house in Ulgii en-route to Ulaankhuus – 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:** Day Four - Roughly 180km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 4 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.



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.

## Day Six & Seven

### Sagsai | Kazakh Eagle Hunter Homestay



Travel to the district of Sagsai where you will be hosted by Sailaukhan or their friends, the brothers Aibolat and Babiolat. All three are eagle hunters and we work closely with all three and their families.

Sailaukhan is one of the most experienced eagle hunters in the region. We like to support him because of the wealth of his knowledge. However, we also like to support Baibolat and Aibolat as they are young brothers who are now head of their household having lost their father.

If you were to meet Aibolat or Baibolat in the street then you would probably dismiss them as young modern Kazakhs. However, both are herders and each owns and trains an eagle.

Both love the Kazakh game of Buzkhashi - the tug of war with a goat carcass. Their way of life is entirely different to that of most of the other older eagle hunters that we work with and that's one reason we work with them - as it gives you a contrasting insight into the diversity of the way of life for the Kazakh eagle hunters.

We leave the two days flexible you'll spend time experiencing the hospitality of the families and learning more about the traditions and culture of the Kazakh eagle hunters. Hopefully, you can watch your host train for the Altansogts Eagle Festival. Although hunting will not be possible you should still be able to experience them training their eagles.



## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** We need you to be flexible in the Altai this close to the Eagle Festival. Most of the Kazakh eagle hunters only have one additional ger for guests to stay in. At times, this is already booked and so you are invited to sleep in the family ger. Don't expect a bed - more a felt mat on the floor of the ger as is typical for Kazakh families. Asian style long drop outside toilet. Alternatively, if you prefer privacy, we always provide tents for each guest and these can be put up next to the family home.
- **Meals:** B/L/D
- **Travel:** Day Six - Roughly 60km on dirt road (approx 1.5 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions

## 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 during the festival or at the homes of the hunters, 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.



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.

# Day Eight & Nine

## Eagle Festival



Spend two days at the two-day Eagle Festival. The festival is 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 our own company ger 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 will 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.

Even better, we invite all the eagle hunters and their families that we work in long-term partnership with for an extended lunch on both days as a thank you. Both lunchtimes typically turn into a street party atmosphere ... just without the street!

**Please note that the location of the September eagle festival has been changing over the past three years. It makes no difference to the trip - wherever it is located in 2021, we'll be there!.**

## Welcome to the EL Festival Ger - a community space



We typically have 8-10 EL guests attending the festival from different departures and we decided to provide our guests with a base and created our EL festival ger.

That means there's somewhere to come and warm up if the day is cold as there's always hot drinks available. You can leave your photography equipment knowing it is secure (there's a charger in each EL tour vehicle).

What's lovely is that the Kazakh eagle hunters we work in long-term local community partnership with like to come and spend the day in the ger - it feels like home to them.

**All the embroidery that decorates the ger has been hand made by Halmira - who does our Kazakh embroidery lessons in Ulgii. We also rent the ger from her so that she benefits financially from our use.**



## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** A mattress at the home of Jako and Baurjan. Outside toilet. Hot shower at the local town shower house. Your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life
  - **Meals:** B/L/D
  - **Travel:**
  - **Day 8** - 40km on dirt road (approx 1 hour driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions
  - **Day 9** - short drives
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## Day Ten & Eleven

### Altai | Kazakh Eagle Hunter Homestay



Transfer through Ulgii - stopping for a hot shower - before you head to the small community of Altai district - in the south of Bayan Ulgii Province.

Altai is a remarkable location - deep on the Chinese border. Your destination is the winter pasture of Kazakh herder and eagle hunter Asker (left) and his wife Ahgul. What makes this family so special is that they have one son (Nargulan - left) 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.

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 as everyone is different in what they like to do and not planning in advance leads to a more respectful and naturally Kazakh 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.



## Meeting the eagle huntress (es) of Mongolia

You've probably heard of Aisholpan (the focus 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, when permission is granted by their families and their school then we arrange a visit. They don't always compete at the festival. However, because the festival takes place on the weekend at least one of them usually visits the festival and we always invite them to lunch during the Eagle Festival. They often bring their mum or dad.

Another way of supporting the local families we work with is by allowing their sons or daughters to accompany on any day hikes or horse treks. It helps to create a space where traditional Kazakh 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. It also makes for a great informal and relaxed day out ... like an extended family picnic. Expect selfies and jumping photos as well.

## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** We need you to be flexible in the Altai this close to the Eagle Festival as accommodation is limited in the region. By September, Asker is usually back in his winter clay house but may provide an additional ger but this depends on the weather. At times, other companies may also be staying there but Asker always provides a private room within the house for EL guests. Alternatively, if you prefer privacy, we always provide tents for each guest and these can be put up next to the family home. Asian style long drop outside toilet. Hot shower available at the local town shower house in Ulgii en-route to Altai – 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:** Day Ten - Roughly 130km total on asphalt and dirt road (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
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# Day Twelve

## Ulgii | Kazakh embroidery lesson (Contingency Day)



Travel back to Ulgii where you will be hosted by our Kazakh translator Jako and her family. 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.



### Meet Halmira

Halmira was widowed when her youngest child was just two. A mother of five, Halmira survived financially by creating traditional Kazakh embroidery. However, apart from local sales she has never really had an outlet for her remarkable skill ... until now. With Halmira, her home is her workshop. Self taught, Halmira uses her own motifs as well as more traditional designs for the Kazakh embroidery and wall hangings she hand makes. She works freehand but uses hand made stencils. For those that wish to, we arrange for you to spend time at the home of Halmira learning this incredible skill.

## Logistics

- **Accommodation:** A mattress at the home of Jako and Baurjan. Outside toilet. Hot shower at the local town shower house. Your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life
  - **Meals:** B/L/D
  - **Travel:** Roughly 130km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 4 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 Thirteen

## Ulaanbataar



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:** Roughly 220km on dirt and asphalt road (approx 4 hours driving time not including stops) depending on if Ulgii or Khovd airport. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions. 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 I offer a sliding price scale. I appreciate your holiday funds are precious and so the more people that book so the price comes down and everyone benefits.

**Group Size - Maximum of six. Minimum of two required for a guaranteed departure**

- 2 Guests US\$ 3215 pp + domestic flight of approximately 750,000 MNT pp
- 3-4 Guests US\$ 3045 pp + domestic flight of approximately 750,000 MNT pp
- 5 Guests US\$ 2800 pp + domestic flight of approximately 750,000 MNT pp
- 6 Guests US\$ 2475 pp + domestic flight of approximately 750,000 MNT 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.

## Carbon Offsets

- Although carbon offsets are far from 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 to buy Plan Vivo Foundation carbon certificates which are used to support the Plan Vivo Mongolian Nomad Project - working in partnership with the Mongolian Society of Range Management. Check our website for more details.

## 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 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**

### 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 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

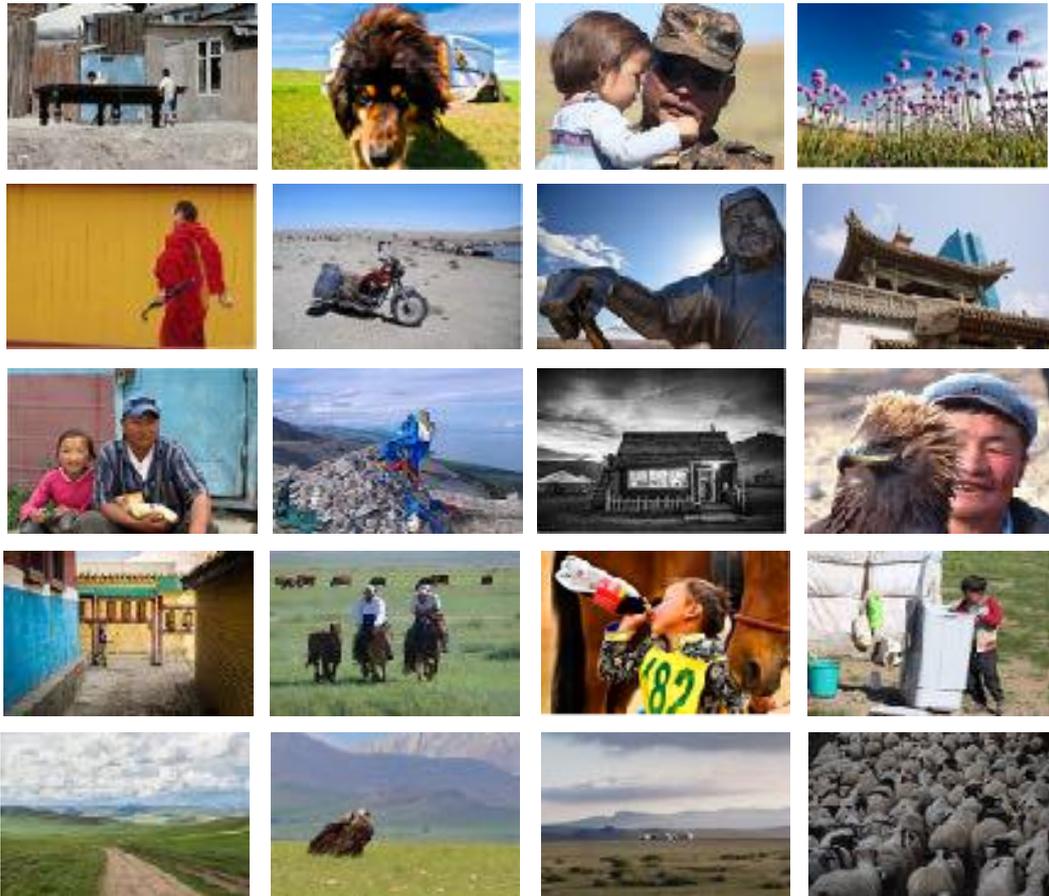


Mongolia is frequently depicted as a pristine untouched wilderness little changed since the time of Chinggis Khan. But this is not 21st Century Mongolia - this is stereotype or clichéd Mongolia. The traditional culture still remains but there is a drive for modernity and progress.

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.

Altai & Eagles Sagsai  
13 Days



There's a hunger for knowledge, understanding, and excellence that drives Mongolian society, and things are changing quickly, but remember that a lot of major changes have happened within just a couple generations. Be patient with Mongolia. While it works through the changes that are going to make it better place, savour the gifts it offers and try to spend less time worrying about small issues that aren't being met - such as hot showers or lack of western toilets. Remember, Mongolians are living this life everyday through all seasons not just for a few weeks.

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

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

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

*Jess*