



Golden Eagle Festival and Snow Leopard Tour

Mongolia Tour

Overview

Venture into western Mongolia as we explore the heart of Mongolian culture, discover the vast array of wildlife, and celebrate alongside Eagle Hunters in this jam-packed adventure across the outdoor capital of the world!

On this adventure, we'll travel from the capital, Ulaanbaatar, out to the far western provinces of Mongolia. This is often described as some of the most beautiful landscapes in the entire country.

We'll link up with a camel caravan and celebrate a local cultural festival in the provincial capital. Afterwards, we go hiking through the majestic mountains of Khovd Aimag in search of the elusive Snow Leopard.

To round it all off, we take part in the Golden Eagle Festival. A chance to see these incredible hunting birds put to the test in competition against other regional hunters.

This tour is, perhaps, our most adventurous trip to Mongolia and will undoubtedly leave you with some incredible memories.



Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Golden Eagle Festival & Snow Leopards Tour** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run through of each day of the trip.*

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Day 1

Arrival Day

AM

- Meet at the Airport | Whenever you arrive, we'll be there to meet you at Chinggis Khan International Airport and drive you into downtown Ulaanbaatar to your hotel.

PM

- Ulaanbaatar | Our adventure will begin with a walking tour around Mongolia's capital city, starting with the central square. Sukhbaatar Square is the beating heart of Ulaanbaatar. Named after the titular Damdin Sukhbaatar, a leading revolutionary in the early 1920s, the square is surrounded by some of the most important buildings in the city. From the government palace, hosting statues of Chinggis Khan and his descendants, to the Cultural Palace, Art and Drama Theatre, Post Office, and City Government Offices.
- Natural History Museum | Skirting around the side of the Soviet-Era Government Palace, we'll take a walk down one of the city's tree-lined boulevards towards the Natural History Museum.
- Formerly the Museum of Lenin, today this grand building houses exhibits about the prehistory of Mongolia and includes a vast room filled with stuffed animals that we hope to see out in the West (where they'll ideally be alive!).
- State Department Store | Following on from our museum trip, we'll make our way through the bustling back streets to the State Department Store. This is the perfect chance to exchange currency for the local Mongolian Tugrik, find weird and wonderful souvenirs, and stock up on any snacks you might want for the upcoming adventure.
- Beatles Statue | Near the State Department Store is an interesting, yet charming, statue dedicated to the Beatles – so we'll head over here to discover why this Liverpoolian band is commemorated so far away from the UK.
- Finally, we'll head to our first group dinner, where we'll also have our pre-tour briefing. This is the chance to ask any pressing questions, find out about the imminent adventure, and make sure you know how to stay safe during the trip.

Accommodation: *Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar*

Included Meals: *Dinner*



Day 2

Flight to Khovd

AM

- Domestic Flight | It's up and out early this morning as we head out of the city to board our domestic flight from Chinggis Khan International Airport to the far western city of Khovd.
- Khovd Monastery | Once we arrive, before we grab some lunch, we'll make a stop at the Khovd Monastery. A typical small-town Buddhist monastery with some truly incredible architecture and filled with brightly coloured artefacts immaculately kept by the resident monks.
- Steppe Hotel | We'll stop at the hard-to-miss Steppe Hotel for lunch. One of the most modern buildings in the city, this restaurant is also our hotel for the night, so we'll drop off our gear, enjoy some local delicacies, and head out for an adventure in Khovd.

PM

- Local Market | Our first stop is the market. This is the perfect chance to rub shoulders with locals and also an opportunity to pick up any last-minute bits and bobs for our coming expedition. Khovd market has everything – whether you need Wellington boots, a tennis racket, or 500 metres of string – this is the place to go. Grab the phrasebook – this is your chance to try out a little Mongolian language, something which always elicit a happy response from the market vendors.
- Khovd Museum | After the market, we'll head over to the Khovd Museum – dedicated to the surrounding province. This Soviet-style museum hasn't yet got the memo from the modern age and is still very much a communist-era highlight. It'll be our chance to learn about the province that we will soon be travelling through – discovering what wildlife we may encounter and finding out about the people we'll meet along the way.
- We'll end the day with a free evening – your chance to explore downtown Khovd, relax on the rooftop balcony of our hotel, or get an early night before our expedition heads into the true countryside tomorrow.

Accommodation: *Steppe Hotel*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 3

Join the Camel Caravan

AM

- **Ovoo** | Today, the adventure really begins! We'll head out early to make the most of the day. Leaving Khovd, we'll make a stop at a lookout point just outside the city. This will give us a chance to see the Ovoo, which sits atop the mountain outside of Khovd. These Ovoos may look like piles of rocks, often with prayer flags sticking out the top, but they are an artefact of pre-Buddhist Mongolia. Many people here still believe in shamanism, and these Ovoos are home to spirits. Locals will walk around them three times, throwing stones at them to bring themselves good luck. Something we will need for our adventure.

PM

- **Camel Caravan** | This is where we'll be meeting with a camel caravan travelling from Khovd, through the picturesque landscape, towards the nearby Khar-us Lake.
- The Camel caravan will be reminiscent of the famed tea trail, which saw tea being transported across the region through Mongolia and joining part of the more significant silk route.
- For those expecting days and weeks out in the wilderness, you may be a little disappointed as this journey is more short-term, looking at how the camels were packed and ridden, and joining the camel herders as they leave the city and head back to their countryside homes. Once loaded, we'll head out from the city limits and walk and ride these beasts throughout the afternoon, eventually stopping to camp for the night.

Accommodation: *Camping*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 4

Arrive at Khar-us Lake

AM

- Today, it's an early start as we continue travelling with the camel caravan. We depart our campsite once our beats of burden are awake and ready to continue.

PM

- Khar-us Lake | Our destination is the picturesque Khar-us Lake. Here, we'll bid farewell to our trusty travelling companions, and meet our local drivers and their sturdy off-road vehicles which will carry us through the wilderness of this particularly beautiful region of the country, heading towards the wildlife-ridden mountain camp which will serve as our home for the next few days.

Accommodation: *Jargalan Khairkhan Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 5

Hiking & Visit a Local Family

AM

- This morning, we'll awake to the beautiful scenic surroundings of Khovd Province.
- Hike | After a hearty breakfast to steel ourselves for the day ahead, we'll head out for a leisurely hike through the surrounding mountains. During our hike, we'll have the chance to spot the local wildlife which calls this beautiful region home and also enjoy a relaxing break after a busy few days.

PM

- Local Nomadic Family | In the afternoon, we'll make a stop at a local nomadic family. Countryside people are famously welcoming to outsiders, and so when we see a ger or a yurt set up on the vast steppe, we'll head over to knock on the door and say hello. During our visit, we'll have the chance to see how Mongolians have lived for hundreds of years, with the traditional Mongolian ger having barely changed since the days of Chinggis Khan.
- After enjoying some traditional snacks alongside our new local friends, we'll head back to our ger camp for a relaxing evening.

Accommodation: *Jargalan Khairkhan Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 6

Search for Snow Leopards

AM

- Snow Leopard | This morning we will head out in search of Mongolia's elusive mountain beast – the Snow Leopard. There are an estimated 35-40 Snow Leopards in this local region of the Altai Mountains. We'll spend our day attempting to observe these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat.
- Observation Points | Our local friends in the mountains have a series of observation points scattered throughout the area which we'll be able to drive to, followed by a short walk up to the final point. These observation posts are perfect for a snow leopard search, as well as watching for some of the other local wildlife which populates these high mountains and deep valleys.
- Trackers | In addition to their observation posts, our local friends have a team of trackers who spend their time in the mountains tracking these majestic creatures and keeping us updated on any opportunities to catch a glimpse.
- Whilst there is a high chance of seeing these incredible animals, roughly 70%, they are incredible masters of camouflage and are rarely seen, even by locals. However, this area grants us the best possible chance in the world to see these wild beasts up close.

PM

- After our day of mountainous searching, we'll head back to camp for a well-deserved rest.

Accommodation: *Jargalan Khairkhan Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 7

Discover Mongolia's Wildlife

AM

- **Wildlife** | Today, we'll head back into the mountains in search of some of the region's most elusive wildlife.
- **Snow Leopards** | If we were unsuccessful yesterday, we'll continue the search for Snow Leopards.
- **Altai Mountains** | If we manage to spot one, we'll refocus our plan for today and delve into the wilderness in search of some of the other rare and elusive creatures which have made the Altai mountains their home.
- We may also catch a rare glimpse of the Palla's cat, a lesser-known, but equally majestic animal which prowls around at altitude hunting for its prey.

PM

- In the evening, we'll head back down the mountain to a relaxing evening with the group at our local camp.

Accommodation: *Jargalan Khairkhan Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 8

Venture to Olgii City

AM

- Khovd City | This morning, we'll bid goodbye to our countryside hosts and make our way back towards Khovd city. This isn't our final destination, but we'll stop for a bite to eat before heading back out on an off-road adventure towards our overnight stop, the city of Olgii – the provincial capital of Bayan-Olgii Aimag.
- We'll travel many hours off-road towards one of the most beautiful provinces in all of Mongolia to join the many local Eagle Hunters who celebrate and compete with their hunting birds.

PM

- Olgii | Upon arrival in Olgii, we'll enjoy some dinner at our overnight stop and prepare for a busy day ahead as the Eagle Festival kicks off tomorrow.

Accommodation: *Local Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 9

Golden Eagle Festival Begins

AM

- After waking, it's a hearty breakfast to prepare for the day, and not just any day as after breaking camp, we join our host and follow him to the region's biggest event, the Golden Eagle Festival.
- The Golden Eagle Festival | It began in 1999 and has grown to be the largest event for eagles and their hunters globally and is recognised by UNESCO as a world heritage cultural event.
- There are smaller, more corporate events across the region, but this is the largest and most traditional. Over 70 hunters are involved yearly who show their Eagle skills and show some more traditional Kazakh games.

PM

- Once at the festival, we first watch the opening ceremony, which sees each participant parading in on horseback with their eagles.
- The competition gets going when the hunters show their hunting outfits and accessories, with the most elaborate and beautiful receiving the highest points.
- Uriankhai Archery | One of the events at the festival is the Uriankhai archery competition. The Uriankhai are a small ethnic group found in this region and famed for their unique style of archery.
- Bactrian Camel Racing | A unique event held at the festival, making quite a grand photographic opportunity.
- Kazakh Costumes | There is also an event for couples who parade within the arena showcasing their traditional Kazakh costumes perfect for those into fashion shows.
- Kazakh Concert | After the events, we will head back to Olgii City and freshen up in our ger camp before heading back out for the evening. This evening, we will enjoy a Kazakh Concert with traditional songs and music within the Bayan Ulgii Theatre, a real soviet gem.

Accommodation: *Local Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 10

Golden Eagle Festival Day 2

AM

- Eagle Flying | Today, is the day when the Golden Eagle Festival gets real, and the anticipated eagle flying begins. So we leave the comfort of our yurts after another great breakfast and arrive early at the event to find the best spot.
- The day starts with some traditional equestrian activities, some a little comical although all steeped in tradition.
- Eagle Flight | The first eagle hunter event involves the hunter calling to his eagle, who is atop a nearby mountain. The eagle is expected to fly down and land gracefully on the hunter's arm.
- Eagle Hunt | The final event sees the eagles tempted to hunt when a horse pulls a lure to simulate a rabbit, hare or fox. This is a real test of not just the hunter's skill in controlling his bird but also showcases the eagle's hunting ability.

PM

- Closing Ceremony | The grand finale is the closing ceremony that sees winners from each event named and the overall eagle hunting champion crowned. The eagle-hunting champion's eagle will then be taken to hunt either a fox or wolf in the wild. Traditionally, this marks the beginning of the eagle-hunting season.
- We will find time for those all-important photo opportunities with the hunters, their eagles, and their families during the event.
- Mongolian Throat Singer | Our last night in Bayan Olgii to enjoy an evening meal with our crew as well as the entertainment of a traditional Mongolian throat singer.

Accommodation: *Local Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 11

Return to Ulaanbaatar

AM

- Leaving our horses, camels, Russian jeeps and friends behind for good, we board a plane and return to Ulaanbaatar.
- This is a free day where you can shop 'til you drop at the city market. You'll never find cheaper cashmere, and you might pick up a shamanistic, Buddhist artefact or a relic from Soviet times.
- Palace of Bogd Khan | History lovers can stop by the winter palace of the Bogd Khan (1869-1922), who became Khagan (theocratic ruler) when the country split from China in 1911. Or you can relax with a coffee or cocktail at an outdoor café and watch this fascinating city unfold before you. Then we'll meet up for dinner at a local family's home so that we can see Mongolian home life away from the steppes.

Accommodation: *Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 12

Departure Day

AM

- We end our adventure in the morning, with transfers to the airport for international flights. Pack your souvenirs, your dirty clothes and your memories, and have a safe trip home!

Included Meals: *Breakfast*

--- END OF TOUR ---