



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## SNOW LEOPARDS OF MONGOLIA

JUNE 22–JULY 6, 2025

©2024



Snow Leopard; Altai Mountains, Mongolia © Attila Steiner

*Few animals in the world stir the soul like the Snow Leopard. At home in the mountain strongholds of central Asia, this magnificent animal—beautiful, mysterious, and almost never seen by Westerners—evokes some of the grandest images of unspoiled nature.*

*We present an unparalleled opportunity to see the amazing Snow Leopard in the Altai Mountains of Khovd, under sensible conditions and relatively comfortable weather. Partnering with Ecotours Wildlife Holidays, we offer a wilderness-style experience amid the foothills of western Mongolia where we'll spend five full days exploring deep rocky valleys and remote mountainous regions in search of this legendary animal. Ecotours pioneered Snow Leopard tours in Mongolia, and its record of success exceeds 80%! Until very recently, Snow Leopard viewing was not to be taken lightly, typified by travel at high elevation,*

*strenuous hikes, tent camping, and extreme temperatures. With this trip we provide what may be the best conditions ever associated with Snow Leopard viewing: lodging in good hotels and ger camps; good meals; and moderate physical demands.*

*Beyond Snow Leopards, western Mongolia is a prime location to observe a range of Asian specialty birds and mammals including Mongolian Ground-Jay, Altai Snowcock, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Bearded (Lammergeier) and Cinereous vultures, Himalayan Griffon, Goitered Gazelle, Argali Sheep, Siberian Ibex, Siberian Marmot, and Saiga Antelope, the latter now critically endangered.*



*Before traveling west, we will journey to Gun Galuut Nature Reserve to witness the beautiful White-naped Crane, and wetlands heaping with waterfowl and shorebirds, including Bar-headed Goose, White-winged Tern, and Relict Gull. The Snow Leopard quest in the region of Khovd will follow. After returning from the mountains, we will travel to the rolling terrain of Hustai National Park, west of Ulaanbaatar, to seek other specialty wildlife such as Daurian Partridge, Przewalski's Horse, Mongolian Gazelle, and Demoiselle Crane. Mongolia is largely unexplored, and the wildlife possibilities are endless.*

*Far more than "just" a mammal viewing tour, Mongolia offers incredible birding opportunities, and we are sure to encounter a range of marvelous birds that are the stuff of dreams for many a birder, with chances for White-headed Duck, Himalayan Griffon, Steppe Eagle, Asian Dowitcher, Amur and Saker falcons. Throughout, songbirds will be singing including Siberian Rubythroat, Daurian Redstart, Azure Tit, Godlewski's Bunting, and several warbler species. The highlands may render specialties such as White-winged (Güldenstädt's) Redstart, Long-tailed Rosefinch, and Pere David's Snowfinch in addition to possibilities for Altai Snowcock and other uncommon species.*

**SPECIAL NOTE:** The centerpiece of this tour is a visit to Khovd, in western Mongolia, where we will search for the Snow Leopard and other highland specialties, taking up roughly half of our time during the tour. Flight schedules to and from western Mongolia can change suddenly, in terms of departure times, dates and even which airport we are departing from. We will do our best to keep our itinerary as close as possible to what is included below. However, the order of locations we will visit, and the duration of our visit to those locations may need to change to accommodate changing domestic flight schedules.

**June 22-23, Days 1-2: International Flight to Ulaanbaatar. Transfer to Terelj.** Most flights from the United States will depart the USA for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Chinggis Khaan International Airport (airport code UBN) on June 22 (Day 1), arriving at different times on June 23 (Day 2).

Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar and clearing customs and immigration, you will be transferred to our hotel in Terelj by our local agents. During the afternoon, we will meet for an optional birding outing in the nearby woodlands. You will be contacted with details and meeting time prior to your departure to Mongolia, once we have everyone's flight schedules.

Terelj is located about 35 miles (56 km) northeast of Ulaanbaatar and is in a stunning forested mountain region of Mongolia, offering birds we are not likely to see anywhere else during the tour, including Eurasian Nutcracker, Red-throated Thrush, Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Eurasian Woodcreeper, and other woodland species. Birds such as Siberian Rubythroat and Two-barred Warbler will be singing. Those that would like to participate in this optional birding outing in Terelj are encouraged to arrive at UBN prior to midday on June 23, or if possible, on June 22. Those that opt out for birding in Terelj will meet that evening in our hotel's lobby for an orientation and dinner.

Early on the evening of June 23 we will meet in our hotel's lobby for a group welcome and introduction followed by dinner.

Depending on your flight routing and if time permits, you may want to depart the USA on June 22 in order to be in Ulaanbaatar in time for the group meeting on June 23, or to allow for potential flight delays and to be well rested. VENT will be happy to assist with additional lodging arrangements and transfers should you choose to arrive prior to June 22.

NIGHTS: Onboard international flight (Day 1)  
Hotel TBA, Terelj (Day 2)

**June 24, Day 3: Lakes of the Steppe – Towards Gun Galuut.** We will leave the Terelj Mountains in several SUVs and drive south, circumnavigating the capital city and continue a couple of hours east towards the wonderful Gun Galuut Nature Reserve. On our way we may make several brief stops for birding, and maybe even stop by a roadside statue commemorating Genghis Khan.



**Demoiselle Cranes, Gun Galuut © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

Before arriving to our ger camp situated in a beautiful river valley, we will stop to scan some of the lakes that dot the vast steppe. These lakes have yielded many surprises in the past including Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck, Gray-headed Lapwing, Asian Dowitcher and the rare Relict Gull. We may also encounter suites of common shorebirds, some of which we may see again, including Eurasian Curlew, Long-toed and Red-necked stints, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden-Plover and Marsh Sandpiper.

White-naped Cranes nest in the marshes of this region and we should find this magnificent bird in family groups along with other crane species including Common and daintier Demoiselles. The lakes also attract numerous water birds including loons, grebes, swans, ducks, scoters, gulls and as many as five species of terns. We may see Bar-headed and Swan geese, Whooper Swan, Common and Ruddy shelducks, Eurasian Wigeon, Garganey, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and with luck, Stejneger's Scoter. Eared and Horned grebes and Arctic (Black-throated) Loon are often spotted in these waters. Mongolian Gull is most common here along with Black-headed. Common and Gull-billed terns are regularly observed in these realms, and we may also find larger Caspians and all three marsh terns: Whiskered, Black and White-winged. This evening, we will settle in the comfortable chalets at the Stepped Nomad Camp in Gun Galuut.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomad Camp, Gun Galuut

**June 25, Days 4: Gun Galuut Nature Reserve.** Gun Galuut protects a range of mountain and steppe habitats along with some varied and exciting wetlands. We will explore the vegetation along the river near our campsite for songbirds. In the past, these have been quite rewarding, rendering a variety of warblers including Pallas's Grasshopper, Dusky, and Two-barred warblers. The beautiful Godlewski's Buntings is a possibility in this region, as well as other seedeaters including Long-tailed Rosefinch, and Meadow, Pine and Pallas's buntings. Olive-backed, Blyth's, and Richard's pipits may be here, as well as Taiga Flycatcher and Siberian Rubythroat.

Of all the four species of wheatear that breed in Mongolia, three including Pied, Isabelline, and Northern could be found here; Desert Wheatear prefers Khovd. The larks may include Asian and Mongolian Short-toed, as well as the attractive Mongolian Lark with its bold head pattern. Surprises are a possibility and may not be limited to passerines. White-tailed Eagles at times show up along this stretch of riverside, and Amur and Saker falcons are possible.



**Amur Falcon, male © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

As we drive across the shortgrass steppe, we'll be making stops for a variety of avian species including raptors, cranes, and a broad assortment of songbirds. We will particularly be on the lookout for the sandy colored Pere David's Snowfinch that inhabits the steppes. The rocky slopes are home to Rock Sparrow and Twite, while Pallas's Sandgrouse could be skulking anywhere in the area. Birds of prey may be represented by Upland Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Black Kite, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Saker and Amur falcons. Eurasian Goshawk, and Little and Eagle owls are also possible. They'll be on the lookout for their prey, composed primarily of rodents and lagomorphs. If we are lucky, we may encounter Brandt's Vole, Tarbagan Marmot, Long-tailed Suslik and Daurian Pika.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomad Camp, Gun Galuut

**June 26, Day 5: Gun Galuut to Ulaanbaatar.** This morning, we will continue exploring the Gun Galuut Nature Reserve. Several mammal species are also possible here, including the magnificent Argali – the largest goat-antelope or wild mountain sheep. The males sport large corkscrew horns on the sides of their heads, and females can at times be found in large flocks, herding their young. Mongolian Gazelles are also possible here. We will spend time scanning the slopes and steppes in search of these animals.

Before leaving the Gun Galuut region, we will once again visit the lakes and marshes on the outskirts. It isn't uncommon to find different birds in these wetlands with every visit. Additional possibilities include Taiga Bean Goose, Tundra Swan, Common Goldeneye, and Black Stork. Pin-tailed, Common, and even Swinhoe's snipes are possible in the marsh edges, as well as Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit. We will likely see White-naped Crane families grazing the fields, and Corsac Foxes roaming the area.

We will then start making our way towards the capital, stopping along the way for interesting wildlife sightings. We will likely see several Oboo Shrines along the way. These are a common sight along Mongolian highways and at mountain tops. They are large heaps of rocks, often with one or various shafts at the center, decorated with flags and other adornments, dedicated to regional deities. They are often

wrapped in blue, reflecting the importance of the sky, and have offerings placed beside them, such as valuable goods and objects, even bicycles, wheelchairs, and food. We will arrive at our hotel in the afternoon and have dinner in the vicinity.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar

**June 27, Day 6: Ulaanbaatar to Khovd.** Today we will take a domestic flight\* to Khovd in western Mongolia. Depending on our flight schedule, we may have time to explore the willow-dominated Tuul River that runs through the southern region of the capital city. Amur Falcon, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline-Tit and Long-tailed Rosefinch are possibilities along the river, including a wide range of waterbirds such as herons, cormorants, and ducks.

The process at the airport can be tedious, and we will make sure to arrive well in anticipation to make sure we are prepared when the flight departs. Please read the sections below regarding luggage and domestic flights. Delays are unpredictable, and possible.



**Pallas's Sandpiper © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

After our flight to Khovd we will be met by the team of local conservationists that will accompany us during our entire stay in this region. We will distribute our group among several off-road capable SUVs and make our way towards our ger camp, where we will stay for the next six nights. The camp is operated by a wildlife protection community, a local organization with the single purpose of protecting the rich nature of the wildlife reserve, which we aim to support with our tour.

Depending on the time of our arrival, we may stop along the way at the vast Khar Us Lake, where a wide range of species

are possible, including pelicans, swans, ducks, waders, and shorebirds. However, our focus will be to arrive at the camp before sundown if possible. Getting there requires driving a stretch of paved highway through the flat steppe, flanked by towering massifs, before venturing entirely offroad across barren country, across rivers and over rocky dunes to arrive at a plateau where the camp will be already set up and waiting for us. The camp at Khovd is situated amid the majestic Altai Range, at the foothills of Jargalant Mountain, with the 12,450-foot summit on one side and Bumbat Mountain on the other side, facing a diversity of semi-desert ecotones, grasslands, and a distant lake. In this stunning, remote landscape we are not likely to find any other human beings apart from our group and local crew.

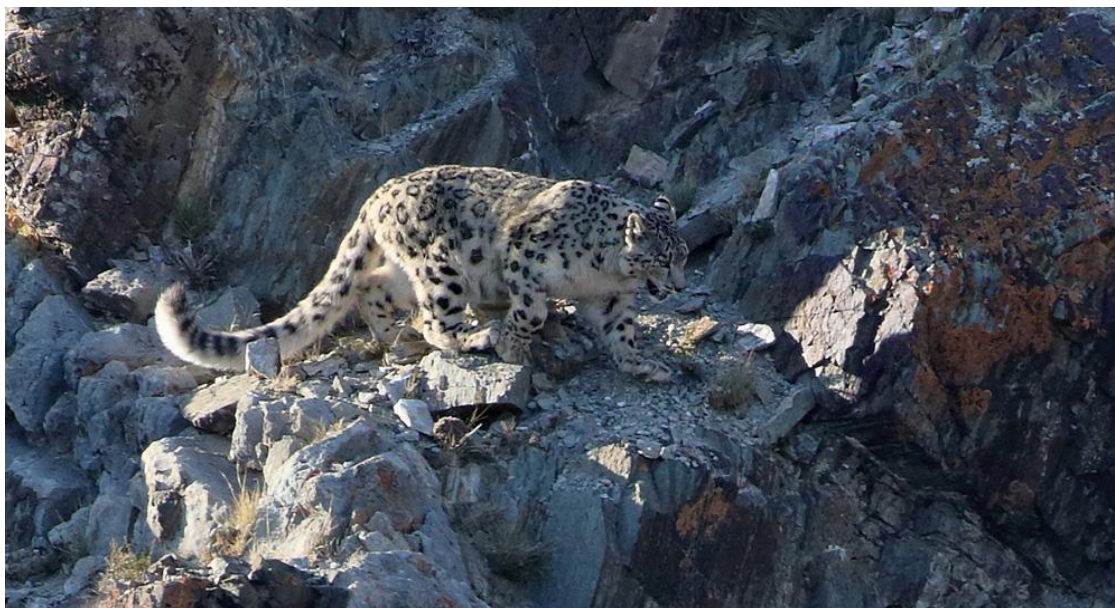
Black Kites and Common Ravens patrol the area near the camp regularly, and Desert Wheatears are usually present along the surrounding slopes. Horned Lark is a common bird of the semi-desert and small flocks are regular here. At night, it isn't uncommon to hear the hooting of Eurasian Eagle-Owls from our gers.

Although we will share basic facilities at the camp, the local team will be sure to provide everything necessary for our comfort. Despite the isolation, our camp will be furnished with a spacious dining area,

restrooms and showers, and well-lit interiors. Please read the section below regarding the camp for more details.

*\* It is important to keep in mind that internal flight schedules in Mongolia are often unreliable due to unpredictable weather conditions and other factors. Sometimes the flights operate according to schedule, while at other times passengers must endure lengthy delays. Participants on this trip should come mentally prepared to have to cope with such delays. We will always hope for the best, but flight delays of some type are probably inevitable. Under such circumstances, we will fill our time with birding in the surrounding area, taking meals, resting, etc. In the event we suffer a lengthy delay such that we would not arrive at our intended destination until late in the evening, your trip leaders reserve the right to choose an alternate accommodation for that night to avoid arriving very late at night at a dark ger camp.*

NIGHT: Ger Camp, Khovd



**Snow Leopard; Altai Mountains, Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

**June 28 Days 7-11: Snow Leopards and specialties of the Altai.** In order to find Snow Leopards, patience and strategy are required, and we will dedicate the following five days primarily to this endeavor. This will involve a slow-paced approach to all of our activities, allowing us to admire the breathtaking scenery, the beautiful alpine flora and the plentiful avifauna of the region as we methodically look for the elusive felines.

Our tour is planned to coincide with the period when Snow Leopards are most active. By working with local conservationists, we hope to hone in on specific locations where these majestic cats were last seen. The terrain we will be traversing has been selected because it is easier to negotiate than other regions where high-altitude, adverse temperatures, and the challenges of acclimatization and remote camping make such a search much more difficult. Although it is not possible to predict how good our chances are of finding Snow Leopards, our local team has had a high rate of success in locating the cats year after year (over 80% success rate), often in easily accessible areas. Since VENT started working with this local team in 2019, we have seen a Snow Leopard during every tour we've operated! Our strategy will be to situate ourselves in key sites where these animals regularly hunt, patrol, and mark their territories.

There will be plenty to observe as we stake out the mountainous realms of the Altai Range, including soaring raptors such as Bearded (Lammergeier) and Cinereous vultures, Himalayan Griffon, Golden and Steppe eagles, Upland Buzzard, and Saker Falcon. We may hear Siberian Marmots whistling to each other from nearby slopes as they too detect soaring predators. Herds of Argali may be seen emerging from rocky outcrops to graze nearby grasslands. We may also spot Siberian Ibex on nearly vertical cliffs, displaying their remarkable climbing abilities.

Our experienced drivers will take us as close as possible to the observation locations. Many of these sites can be reached by the four-wheel-drive vehicles we will be using. Walking may be limited to a few meters from our vehicles, but sometimes we may need to take longer walks that will demand an ability to walk on rocky, uneven or steep terrain. We will have plenty of time to proceed at a pace comfortable for all of us.

As we continue our pursuit, we will see many White-winged Snow-finches flying around us, as well as the local race of Horned (Brandt's) Lark, which is substantially drabber than its western relatives. Mongolian Finch, Brown Accentor, Northern Wheatear, Rock Sparrow, and Twite will be common. Those with sharp eyes may be first to spot a beautiful White-winged (Güldenstädt's) Redstart or a Great Rosefinch descending from high-altitude nesting grounds as we scan the cliffs for stunning Altai Snowcocks strutting the ledges. The lower slopes are home to a dense population of Chukar, as well as Isabelline Wheatear, Isabelline Shrike, and with luck the elusive Mongolian Accentor. From the ravines we may hear the singing of Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Godlewski's and Gray-necked buntings, and more.



**Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) © Rafael Gálvez**

Aside from searching for Snow Leopards, there will be many other targets to look for. Several mammal species make their home in the Altai, and are otherwise difficult to find elsewhere on the planet. With its down-curved snout and bloated nostrils, the Saiga antelope is one of the most peculiar ungulates and is now critically endangered, yet Mongolia holds two populations. One population of the *tatarica* subspecies – considered by some a separate species – resides in a semi-desert plain only a few kilometers from our base camp on the shore of salty Lake Durgan. They can achieve very high speeds and are easily identifiable because they hold their head down while running.

While searching for Saiga, we have good chances of finding the Pallas's Sandgrouse. Meanwhile, the lakeside is often a good place to observe Eurasian Spoonbill, Pallas's and Mongolian (Herring) gulls, Caspian Tern, Greater and Lesser sand-plovers and other shorebirds, plus many ducks.



We may also have the option for another highlight during an after-dinner walk from our camp into the surrounding desert, as we search with the aid of flashlights for the hopping, glowing eyes of jerboas. With luck and a dose of skill we may be able to closely approach and observe these tiny kangaroo-like rodents as they feed on insects. Their huge ears and long tails that end in a fluffy fur ball make them a memorable species to encounter. Mongolian Five-toed (Siberian) Jerboa is the commonest species here, but past trips have also produced Northern Three-toed and Andrew's jerboas.



**Altai Snowcocks © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

At some point, we also hope to visit Khar Us Lake and the adjacent wetlands, which offer a variety of new species. Dalmatian Pelican and Whooper Swan breed within the vast expanse of reeds. Pallas's Gull and Whiskered and Caspian terns can also be found there. Massive concentrations of waterfowl inhabiting the lake include White-headed Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Garganey, Red-crested and Common pochards, Tufted Duck and Great Crested Grebe. Shorebirds and waders can be found along the muddy shores, including Black-winged Stilt, Northern Lapwing, Kentish Plover, Pin-tailed and Common snipes, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted and Common redshanks, Wood and Green sandpipers, and others. Gray Heron and Great Egret are quite common here, and with persistence we may find small flocks of Eurasian Spoonbills. From within the reed beds, Bearded Reedlings may be heard calling while Western Marsh Harriers glide over the wetlands. Along the shores we will look for Asian Short-toed Larks, Richard's and Water pipits, and Citrine, Gray, and Western Yellow wagtails. Breeding birds will be on the move, feeding, with large flocks of swallows including Siberian House and Pale martins, and if time allows, we may visit a nearby plantation in search of Dusky Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Siberian Stonechat, and Eurasian Nightjar. In the desert dunes we will look for the charismatic Mongolian Ground-Jay, Desert Wheatear, and Asian Desert Warbler.



**Khoomei performers in Khovd © Rafael Gálvez**

If we have an opportunity – and depending on the period of operation this season – we may also pay a visit to a banding station coordinated by the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia. The volunteers set up nets along a riparian forest, where the Tugrug River bends by a sheer cliffside, not far from Khar Us Lake. The volunteers are always welcoming and aren't shy about sharing their knowledge and the birds they are studying. In past visits, we have seen many interesting birds there, including Paddyfield Warbler, Bluethroat, and many others.

We will also have an opportunity to appreciate the region's ancient cultural and spiritual heritage. Our time in western

Mongolia will culminate with a performance by local "throat singers." *Khoomei*, the ancient art of overtone singing is listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Practiced for centuries in Mongolia as an acoustic expression of the region's expansive character. Taking a lifetime to master, the singers are able to produce an otherworldly whistle-like harmonic overtone riding over a guttural melody, produced by engaging the throat. Performers typically dress in traditional robes, and are accompanied by a regional lute or viol, and sing about life on the steppe, its animals, and its people. These local musicians always give authentic and moving performances, leaving us with a wonderful end to our visit in the Altai of Mongolia.

NIGHTS: Ger Camp, Khovd



**Mystical Mongolian landscape © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

**July 3, Day 12: Kvod to Ulaanbaatar.** After bidding farewell to the magical landscape of Khovd, we will drive this morning to the airport and fly back to Ulaanbaatar. Typically, flights back to the capital depart from the airport at Khovd. However, we must be prepared for the possibility of flights to be scheduled out of the town of the town of Ölgii, to the northwest of our camp, and a more distant drive. Depending on the time and location of our departure, we may have time for some birding prior to our flight. Lunch will likely be in the town where we depart from, and dinner in Ulaanbaatar, either at the airport or near our hotel.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar



**Saiga Antelope © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

**July 4 Day 13: Hustai National Park.** This morning, we will leave the capital in our private vehicles towards Hustai National Park. Birding opportunities may commence soon after leaving the hustle and bustle of the city. The vast green pastures surrounding the capital can be excellent places to encounter large flocks of corvids, with hundreds of congregating Daurian Jackdaws, Rooks, Carrion Crows and Red-billed Choughs. In past years, we have also found large flocks of Demoiselle Cranes on our way to Hustai, and in some cases have seen thousands of them passing us overhead and even landing in adjacent fields. Soon, we will find ourselves in Hustai National Park, home to the sole true wild horse species in the world – the Przewalski’s Horse, known regionally as *Thaki*. This night we will be based out of a ger camp close to the park’s entrance.

Long-tailed Suslik, Tarbagan Marmot and Mongolian Gerbil are possibilities as we stroll along rolling hills within Hustai National Park. However, our attention may time and again return to admire the wild horses, which have been successfully reintroduced into the steppe after their extirpation during the 1900s and are now protected. The rocky areas of the park are home to Pied and Northern wheatears, Meadow Bunting, and Lesser Whitethroat. As we continue exploring deeper into the park, the elm groves along the valley may reveal a small population of elegant Amur Falcons, while Lesser Kestrels hunt the hillsides, and Steppe

and Golden eagles patrol the skies. Some locations in the park may even render Daurian Partridge. Mongolian Lark should also be present here.

On this day, we will also have a chance to increase our mammal list. We will drive a few kilometers away from the national park's central region into the lowlands to look for Mongolian Gazelle. Wapiti or the Siberian form of the Elk – also known as Red Deer – can congregate on the slopes of Hustai in large numbers. The large national park may also grant us an opportunity to see the “Mongolian” Wolf, a distinct subspecies of the Gray Wolf that may be spotted early in the evening after carefully scanning the gentle hillsides.

This night we will be based out of a ger camp with similar accommodations as those described in western Mongolia.

NIGHT: Hustai Camp, Hustai National Park



Crossing the wilds of Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

**July 5 Days 14: Return to Ulaanbaatar.** This morning, we will leave our camp in Hustai, and slowly make our way back to Ulaanbaatar. We will explore the dunes on the park's outskirts for songbirds and raptors – and even some mammals. In the past we have seen Red Foxes foraging in the area. The bushes in this peculiar habitat offer shelter and stopover habitat to a broad array of species, including buntings, flycatchers, and shrikes, using the perches to sally out for food, while the open country may allow us to find Eastern Marsh Harriers. Even Little Owls may be discovered in some outcrop.

In the afternoon, we will arrive at our hotel. If time allows, we may have the option of visiting the city prior to dinner. We will enjoy our final meal and list at a nearby restaurant.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar

**July 6, Days 15: Departure for home.** We will organize transfers to the airport throughout the day. When booking your return flight, please keep in mind that transfers will depart from the hotel about four hours before the scheduled departing flight times. If you schedule an early flight, your departure from the hotel will be very early.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 10 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

**TOUR LEADERS: Rafael Galvez and Attila Steiner.**



**Rafael Galvez** has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, [GalvezBirds.com](http://GalvezBirds.com).



**Attila Steiner** is a keen birdwatcher and naturalist. He worked for WWF on species conservation and wildlife trade before joining Ecotours Wildlife Holidays, for whom he leads tours to most countries in Eastern Europe, plus Ghana and Ethiopia. Attila has traveled extensively throughout most of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the American continent. He speaks English, German, and Spanish. His thorough knowledge of not only birds, but butterflies and dragonflies as well, is complemented by a special sense of humor.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$12,795** per person in double occupancy from Ulaanbaatar. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 14, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Ulaanbaatar and return, internal flight baggage fees, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$765**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (February 3, 2025). If you prefer to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (January 23, 2025) prior to the tour departure date.

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

#### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

##### **Cancellation by Participant on Snow Leopards of Mongolia:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 209 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:  
210 days or more before departure date  
209 to 151 days before departure date  
150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:  
Your deposit(s) minus \$500\*  
No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance will be refunded  
No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

### **Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption,

medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit:

<https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

**Coronavirus (COVID-19):** In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/).

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.



**BAGGAGE:**

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

We request you limit your luggage to one medium-sized piece and one carry-on bag. **For internal flights in Mongolia, baggage weight limits are 10 kg (22 lbs) for checked bags, and 5 kg (11 lbs) for carry-on. These weight limits are taken seriously and all bags are weighed. Bags exceeding the allowable weight limits will be subject to surcharges ranging between \$1.50 to \$2 USD per each extra kg of overage. The fee is to be paid in local currency only. Please keep in mind that weight limits and fees can change at any time.** For this reason, we strongly recommend procuring local currency. Please refer to the CURRENCY section below.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

**CLOTHING:** Casual dress is the rule for this trip; however, short pants, short skirts, and halter-tops are not appropriate in this rather conservative region. You may want to pack one set of slightly "smarter" clothes to wear at our hotel in Ulaanbaatar. Hard-wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. Participants should bring layers rather than one or two large items. Nights, evenings, and mornings can be cool at higher altitudes, even in June and July. Temperatures can change suddenly from hot to cold or vice versa. Several layers of clothing are recommended as temperatures could drastically shift with elevation. Particularly on the peaks of the Altai, the wind can be cold, and temperature have even been registered in the low 40s°F at this time of year, so be sure to pack a good down jacket or warm sweaters, a warm hat and even a pair of gloves, just in case. Some participants may find the need for thermal underclothing, and silk or synthetic long underwear has been highly rated during cold situations. Sturdy, rainproof jackets and pants are strongly recommended (shower proof plastic jackets are not sufficient). However, during most of the tour, we should experience daytime temperatures in the 70s°F, with highs in the lowland steppe of Khovd and in Hustai possible in the upper 80s°F and completely sunny.

**FOOTWEAR:** Sturdy hiking boots with a solid lug sole are essential; sneakers or sports-type shoes are not appropriate, as the ground will be rough, sandy and occasionally wet and possibly slippery a lot of the time in Mongolia. Some flip-flops or shower shoes are recommended.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is not guaranteed at all camps and hotels.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** Due to its landlocked nature, Mongolia possesses a continental climate prone to extreme temperature swings. The average altitude of the country is 5,184 feet (1,580 m), another factor that shapes regional climate. On sunny days in June and July, the temperature may reach upwards of 80°F, and the sunshine can feel very hot. Even on such warm days, the evenings and early mornings can be quite cool, with temperatures during certain circumstances dropping into the 40s. Our ger camp in the Altai Mountains is situated at 6,500 feet (1,981 m) and we will be spending prolonged periods at altitudes around 12,100 feet (3,700 m). At these elevations, at this season, the weather can change rapidly in a short period of time. Therefore, it is essential to always have warm clothes with you in the vehicles, even on sunny days.

## **CONDITIONS:**

**Accommodations:** Mongolia is not a typical tourist destination in the traditional sense. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is highly variable, ranging from good in Ulaanbaatar to more minimal away from the capital city. In Ulaanbaatar, we will stay in a modern-style hotel. While modernity has been fast to overtake the capital in many aspects, customer services and some amenities are still works in progress. Few Mongolians speak English, and staffing in hotels can at times be limited. The city itself is going through growing pains, and this is most evident in the chaotic traffic everywhere and at all hours in Ulaanbaatar. Transportation through the city can take a long time, and it can be difficult to find a taxi. Construction cranes are also everywhere, and they tend to dominate views of the skyline. As a result, the city is loud and brash. Hotels often struggle with staffing, traffic access, and even the availability of water for certain periods. We are always working hard in conjunction with our local partners to ensure that we are using the best hotels Ulaanbaatar has to offer.



**Ger camp in the Altai Mountains © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

In Terelj, we will be using a resort-style hotel in a natural setting, with easy access to birding locations and beautiful views of the mountains. At the Gun Galuut Steppe Nomad Camp, we will be staying in “chalets” by the Kherlen River, in a beautiful steppe setting with excellent birding opportunities within the property. Each chalet has its own toilet and bathroom, and control of its own air conditioning unit. The encampment includes a dining building where we will have our meals and is the only place where Wi-Fi internet connection is typically available.

In the Khovd Region of western Mongolia and in Hustai, we will be staying in gers. Gers are the traditional large round felt tents of the region (what Russians call yurts). The camps are almost like tented motels, and the gers are spacious and cozy and often heated by wood fires when necessary. The ger locations are situated at delightful sites amidst steppe, desert, and mountain scenery. The ger camp in Khovd was built specifically for groups searching for Snow Leopards, and has no permanent plumbing or electricity. In Khovd, generators are turned on for a few hours each night. The camp in Hustai has electrical features and is adjacent to permanent buildings that offer additional amenities.



**Ger camp: exterior and interior images © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays**

Gers typically have a single twin size bed for individuals, or two beds for couples, with a table for luggage and personal belongings. In Khovd, the gers also have a wash basin, while in Hustai, bathroom and shower facilities are available at all hours in public stalls within permanent buildings with electricity and plumbing. The toilet facilities in Khovd are basic and consist of outhouses, which typically have toilet seats and are kept clean. Hot showers are available in the evenings, when the generator is turned on, and these are in a separate cottage adjacent to the gers. Each camp also has its own dedicated dining space where meals are served, and where hot water, soft drinks and some alcoholic beverages are typically available.

**Altitude:** Mongolia has an average elevation of 5,200 feet (1,580 m), with its highest mountains rising to more than 14,000 feet (4,300 m). Except for when driving up to search for Snow Leopard in Khovd – which will not exceed four separate attempts – we will likely not ascend above 7,500 feet (2,300 m). However, to search for Snow Leopard, we may drive up to 12,100 feet (3,700 m). Typically, this involves prolonged scanning and observation from locations adjacent to our vehicle without the need for any appreciable walking. Chairs are provided for these prolonged vigils. In some cases, once we have found a Snow Leopard and approached it with the vehicles as close as possible, those interested in getting a closer look may opt to walk closer – with the leadership of guides – requiring at times a hike on a rocky slope. For this, hiking poles may be advantageous.

Elsewhere, at lower altitudes, most if not all the walking will be on fairly flat, albeit sometimes sandy, dusty or rough, stony terrain. We will rarely be walking along paved roads in Mongolia. However, we will walk at a slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

**Travel:** Our ground travel will be done entirely on 4x4 SUV type vehicles or off-road Delica vans. In order to reach the various habitats and birds of this vast country, there will be a good amount of driving. After driving on poorly paved roads leaving the capital, we are unlikely to travel on anything other than dirt roads and sometimes bumpy and dusty desert tracks. At times we will traverse small rivers, dried up riverbeds, and screes where stones may make the journey arduous. We'll be using vehicles admirably suited to the purpose and making frequent stops, but some discomfort is inevitable. Because of this, breakdowns, flat tires and getting stuck in sand happen frequently. Although this can appear frustrating at first, almost everybody in Mongolia (including our ground crew) are experts in these situations, and with so many birds to see, a half hour delay is often a good chance for more birding. There may be the occasional uphill tract where we may opt for walking so that the vehicles don't flush birds. In such cases, the vehicle can typically follow closely behind, or pick us up after we found the desired species.

Travel to the Khovd Region where we will search for Snow Leopard will be done via a domestic flight from and back to Chinggis Khaan International Airport (airport code UBN). Typically, we have used Aero Mongolia, Hunnu Air, or Mongolian Airlines (MIAT).

**Internal flights:** Internal flight schedules in Mongolia are notoriously unreliable. Sometimes the flights operate according to schedule while at other times passengers must endure lengthy delays. Participants on this trip should come mentally prepared to have to cope with such delays. We will always hope for the best, but flight delays of some type are probably inevitable. Under such circumstances, we will fill our time with birding near the airport, taking meals, resting, etc. In the event we suffer a lengthy delay such that we would not arrive at our intended destination until late in the evening, your trip leaders reserve the right to choose an alternate accommodation for that night in order to avoid arriving very late arrivals.

**Notes on Snow Leopard Viewing:** Our chances of seeing a Snow Leopard are high, and viewing the animal is the trip's highest objective. However, once we have obtained prolonged, satisfactory views, we will turn our attention to other species, mainly birds and other special mammals. This tour is not designed or

intended exclusively for viewing Snow Leopards. We emphasize this point because the leopard viewing areas are in Khar Us National Park, in designated core protected areas. As such, the park authorities want us to be away from the area after a reasonable amount of time in order to minimize disturbance to the animals and their prey.

We will have five full days in the mountains, three of which we will dedicate entirely to seeking Snow Leopards if necessary. Our experience indicates that this is a satisfactory amount of time to achieve success, and thus far, during every VENT *Snow Leopards of Mongolia* tour, we have been successful in finding a Snow Leopard during this time frame.

**EQUIPMENT:** One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Mongolia:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment, etc. This can be left at all times in the vehicles for easy access, so you won't have to carry with you.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock** – Battery operated is best.
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection** – Essential! Bring a back-up pair as well.
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions** – All essential items.
- **Personal toiletries** – There will be none provided at the ger camps, and hotels in the capital often have a limited selection of items.
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries** – Please bring all the camera equipment, spare flash-cards, batteries, and film that you will need. Flash-cards and film will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Ulaanbaatar. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little film or flash-card space, and this can cause some distress.** UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem.
- **Small flashlight or headlamp** – A good flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each. A small flashlight or headlamp is essential to find your way around camp at night, especially at checklist sessions. Generators will turn off each night after 10 pm, and should you need to use the outhouse, a flashlight will be essential.
- **Plastic bags** – Plastic bags are very useful for protecting equipment from rain and light dust.
- **Water bottle** – Drinking water is always provided. While bringing a bottle of your own is not essential, some people prefer to have their own bottle for having an extra supply on hand, and help reduce waste.
- **Tissue packs and Handy-wipes** – These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour. Although basic shower facilities will be available in camp, some participants found the use of handy-wipes sufficient for some nights.
- **One bath towel and washcloth:** The ger camps where we will stay have shared bathrooms where showers and sinks are available. Each person will be provided with a single bath towel and wash cloth. Please bring an extra towel if you require more than this basic allotment.
- **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.
- **Walking stick** – Collapsible walking sticks will come in handy in several situations. They are strongly recommended for those with balance problems.
- **Small folding stool** – Many people find this item extremely useful when we are patiently waiting for shy birds. Note that folding stools will be available for every participant in the Snow Leopard viewing area.

- **Snacks** – Snacks are always provided during the day before lunch including nuts, chocolate, and dried fruit. However, other western-style snacks may not be readily available. As such, if you require more, we recommend bringing a supply of other snacks such as granola bars or protein bars.

### **BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes** – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, we strongly recommend that you do so. We will spend a lot of time scanning for Snow Leopards and other mammals. The more scopes we have available, the better.

### **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:**

**PASSPORTS** – A valid passport is required for entry into Mongolia. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk’s office. You may also visit [www.state.gov/travel/](http://www.state.gov/travel/) for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

**VISAS** – Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens for stays fewer than 90 days. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

NOTE: Travelers arriving or departing Mongolia through Beijing, China should be aware of Chinese visa regulations. For more information on current requirements see the Consular Information Sheets for these countries at the Bureau of Consular Affairs web page: <http://travel.state.gov/>.

**CURRENCY:** Your tour fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you will want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items, in addition to possible overweight bag charges for internal flights. It is best to carry small denominations of cash in U.S. dollars as most places will be unable to provide change for large bills. Bank notes need to be in good condition as hotels and other money changing places may refuse damaged or torn notes. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted. The currency of Mongolia is the Mongolia Tughrik (or Tögrög) (MNT), and you should consider carrying a small amount of the local currency. USD can be exchanged for MNT at the international airport and at banks near the hotel in Ulaanbaatar.

**NOTE: Baggage weight limits for internal flights are limited. There is a good chance the weight of your bags will exceed the allowable amounts, thus resulting in surcharges to the tune of \$1.5 - \$2 USD for each kg of overage. These fees must be paid in local currency. We therefore recommend obtaining a small supply of Mongolian currency.**

Please note that traveler's checks are no longer widely accepted (and we suggest that you do NOT use them). ATM machines are available at a few select stops if you need additional cash (but are not guaranteed to work). Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

**ELECTRICITY:** Mongolia uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. The sockets are designed to accommodate two round prongs in the Russian/European style. Hotels and permanent ger camp will cater to type C, two-pronged plugs, but power strips at each ger at our camps may differ individually to include type C, E or even some odd types. Consider bringing a universal multi-plug adapter. Do not rely on an electric razor, or having electricity available for charging your video batteries especially while at camps. In the Khovd camp, the generator will be on only in the evenings roughly from 5 or 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Electrical outlets are available in the dining ger where equipment may be charged.

**INTERNET:** Wi-Fi or the internet may only be available in Ulaanbaatar. Even there it may be spotty or adequate for email and simple transmissions only; no web-streaming or video speeds should be expected. Typically, we can also expect limited Wi-Fi connectivity in the restaurant buildings in Gun Galuut and in Hustai.

**LANGUAGE:** Mongolia is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Kazakh, Uzbek and Korean. The traditional Mongolian script looks like Arabic turned 45 degrees. In more recent times the Russian Cyrillic alphabet was adopted with two additional characters. Mongolian also has a Romanized form, although the 35 Cyrillic characters give a better representation of Mongolian sounds.

**TIME:** Mongolia operates on Ulaanbaatar Time (ULAT) and is twelve hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

**SHOPPING:** Most of Mongolia's economy is based on natural products: hand-woven carpets, leather clothing and articles, woolen clothing, furs, cashmere, camel hair products, Mongolian oil and water paintings, wooden toys, puzzles and games. There are a number of souvenir shops around the capital where the most popular items can be purchased. We will not be providing any time during our tour for any type of souvenir shopping, so this must be done before or after the tour.

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying "Up to Date" with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

**Food and water:** Participants are advised NOT to drink tap water or unboiled water placed at the table unless advised by your tour leader. Bottled drinks (including bottled water) will be available at all times. You should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables, or food that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open, permitting flies to settle. Unpeeled fruit is fine, provided you wash the exterior first in clean water.

**Biting insects:** Mosquitos and biting flies could be a nuisance in some places. We suggest bringing a stick-type repellent for your face and hands. We also recommend the usual precautions of wearing pants and long-sleeved shirts at all times when in the field.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be

repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.

- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permethrin is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

[www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-repellent-right-for-you#search](http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-repellent-right-for-you#search)

**Sun Exposure:** The sun's ultraviolet rays are damaging to the eyes and skin with prolonged exposure, particularly at higher elevation. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

## Field Guides:

### **Birds:**

Gombobaatar, S., A. Graunlich and Sh. Bolbaatar. ***Birds of Mongolia***. Princeton University Press, 2019.

This field guide is the most comprehensive account on the Mongolian avifauna to date, with illustrations for all documented species. It features regional distribution maps and status information that is recent. This volume is also available through Helm Field Guides.

Ganbold, D., C. Smith. ***A Field Guide to the Birds of Mongolia***. Beaufoy Publishing, 2019. Published soon after the guide above, it includes all-new illustrations, unlike the prior. However, the illustrations are substandard in comparison. Overall similar presentation, text, and maps. A good complimentary volume.

Aye, R., M. Schweizer and T Roth. ***Birds of Central Asia***. Princeton University Press, 2012. This guide is beautifully illustrated but is not comprehensive for the birds we will see on the tour.

Brazil, M. ***Birds of East Asia***. Princeton University Press, 2009. Another nicely illustrated guide that is not comprehensive for the birds we will see on the tour.

### **Mammals:**

Mallon, D. P. ***The Mammals of the Mongolian People's Republic***. *Mammal Rev.* 15(2):71-102.

Smith, A. T. and Xie, Y. (Eds) ***A Guide to the Mammals of China***. 2008. Princeton.

This is the only guide to all the mammals of China and includes many species we are likely to encounter in Mongolia.

### **Plants:**

Hilbig, W. ***The Vegetation of Mongolia***. Amsterdam, SPB Academic Publishing.

Polunin, O. and Stainton, A. ***Flowers of the Himalaya***. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984.

A very helpful guide; while not quite encompassing Mongolia, it will help somewhat with the flowering plants we encounter.



**History:**

Weatherford, Jack. **Genghis Kahn and the Making of the Modern World**. Broadway Books. 2005.

A fascinating and highly regarded modern look at one of history's towering figures.

**Apps:**

**Merlin** – App. Available for Apple and Android devices.

This app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is taking the birding world by storm. It is free to download, and the various country and region packs are also free of charge. The Mongolia pack will need to be uploaded once Merlin is installed. It contains sound and photo identification content, maps and text. It is driven by eBird data, and the app is getting increasingly better over time in helping identify sounds and photos.

**Collins Bird Guide** – App. Available for Apple and Android devices.

This is the app version of the famed **Birds of Europe** by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterström (Second Edition 2009, available through Princeton University Press). The app includes the common birds of the Palearctic and vagrants native to Siberia and Central Asia, many of which are found in Mongolia. The app is superbly illustrated and includes recorded vocalizations for most species. This app makes a great supplement, but should not be considered a comprehensive guide to Mongolia.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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