SNOW LEOPARDS OF MONGOLIA

June 20 - July 5, 2027



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 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, Tarbagan 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. Recently, we've had success finding Gray Wolf in Hustai. 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 Bar-headed Goose, Black-billed Capercaillie, Steppe Eagle, Asian Dowitcher, Amur and Saker falcons. Throughout, songbirds will be singing including Red-flanked Bluetail, 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 NOTES: 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.

It is IMPORTANT that you read the "What to Expect in Mongolia" section below. Mongolia is a unique, seldom visited destination, and travelers should be prepared to encounter cultural norms that differ from those in the West.

June 20-21, Days 1-2: International Flight to Ulaanbaatar. Stay at Mongolica Hotel

Tour participants should plan on arriving in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Chinggis Khaan International Airport (airport code UBN) by June 22 (Day 2).

Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar and clearing customs and immigration, you will be transferred to Mongolica Hotel on the outskirts of the capital by our local agents. You will receive communications prior to the tour with final details about transfers to the hotel. The hotel grounds are forested, with nearby cliffsides and tributaries of the Tuul River. Several interesting bird species may be found on these grounds, some of which might not be seen elsewhere during the tour, including Amur Falcon, Azure Tit, White-cheeked Starling, and Long-tailed Rosefinch. We will be returning to Mongolica Hotel time and again, so we will have several opportunities to catch up with these birds.

NIGHTS: Onboard international flight (Day 1)

Mongolica Hotel, Ulaanbaatar (Day 2)

June 22-23, Days 3-4: Terelj

The morning of the 23rd, we will meet for breakfast at the hotel at 8 a.m., after which we will have our first meeting and orientation. At 10 a.m. we will meet with our bags packed, ready for a group transfer to Terelj. We plan on arriving in Terelj by midday. After lunch, and once settled into our gers, we will set out to explore the forests and slopes of this region.



Demoiselle Cranes, Gun Galuut © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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.

Early on the morning of the 24th, we will travel to Taiga Forests in the surrounding region with the aim of arriving early to hear the morning chorus and to find birds setting out on their foraging routines. The forests are dense at these sites and host various species, some of which are quite elusive. With strategy and patience, we may find Black-billed Capercaillie, Black and Great Spotted woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatch, Taiga Flycatcher, Red-flanked Bluetail, Eurasian Siskin, and more.

NIGHTS: Terelj Lodge, Terelj National Park

June 24, Day 5: 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 may even stop by a roadside statue commemorating Chinggis Khan.

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 waders and shorebirds, some of which we may see again, including Black Stork, Eurasian Spoonbill, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Long-toed and Red-necked stints, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden-Plover and Marsh Sandpiper.

White-naped Cranes and Demoiselle Cranes nest in the marshes of this region, and we should find these magnificent birds in family groups, with downy colts foraging along with their parents. Common and Siberian cranes have also been found in this region in recent years. 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, Red-crested and Common pochards, 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 Steppe Nomad Camp in Gun Galuut.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomad Camp, Gun Galuut

June 25, Days 6: 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 Bunting 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 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 7: Gun Galuut to Mongolica Hotel

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 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 snipe 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 Ovoo 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 there.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar

June 27, Day 8: 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 in time so that we are prepared when the flight departs. Please read the sections below regarding luggage and domestic flights. Delays are unpredictable and possible.

Once in 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 five 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.



Pallas's Sandgrouse © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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 many other human beings apart from our group and local crew.

***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 alternate accommodations for that night to avoid arriving very late at night at a dark ger camp.

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 is common 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 "Accommodations" beginning on page 20 for more camp details.

NIGHT: Ger Camp, Khovd



Snow Leopard; Altai Mountains, Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

June 28-July 1, Days 9-12: Snow Leopards and specialties of the Altai

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 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 Tarbagan 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.



Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) © Rafael Gálvez

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 comfortable pace for all.

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, Greenish Warbler, Godlewski's and Gray-necked buntings, and more.



Altai Snowcocks © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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 Durgun. 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 gulls, Caspian Tern, Greater and 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 most common species here, but past trips have also produced Northern Three-toed and Andrew's jerboas.



Khoomei performers in Khovd © Rafael Gálvez

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, Paddyfield Warblers, Blyth's and Great reed warblers may be seen foraging 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, the Desert Wheatear, and the Asian Desert Warbler.

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, 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 2, Day 13: Kvod to Ulaanbaata

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 scheduled out of the town of Ölgi or Altai, to the northwest of our camp, and more distant drives. Depending on the time and location of our departure, we may have time for birding prior to our flight.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar



Saiga Antelope © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

July 3 Day 14: Hustai National Park

This morning, we will leave the capital in our private vehicles towards Hustai National Park. Birding opportunities may be possible anywhere along the way. 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. Altai wapiti, or Siberian Elk, 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

July 4 Day 15: Return to Ulaanbaatar

In the past, we have benefited from a private program offered to us by the park rangers at Hustai, to seek out Gray Wolves. If we are able to participate in the program in 2027, we will be reentering the park before daybreak with the aim of settling into the haunts of known wolf packs with the hopes of getting close and seeing them. We have had great success with this program in the past. After lunch, we will leave our camp in Hustai and slowly make our way back to the Mongolica Hotel. 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, and dozens of Steppe Eagles staging over the fields.

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 for additional birding within the hotel grounds. We will enjoy our final meal and list at the hotel's restaurant.

NIGHT: Mongolica Hotel & Resort, Ulaanbaatar



Crossing the wilds of Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

July 5, Day 16: 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 three hours before the scheduled departing flight times. If you schedule an early flight, your departure from the hotel will be very early.

ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 10 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER(s): This tour is led by **Rafael Galvez** and **Attila Steiner**.



Rafael Galvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood—a lifelong dual passion that began when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. With a sketchpad always close at hand, he has traveled across the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in search of birds, inspiration, and stories to share.

Rafael's work bridges art, education, and conservation. He served as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, where he helped develop educational and conservation programs. During his time in the Caucasus, he coauthored and illustrated *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)* and produced documentaries and books on Georgian chant traditions and Russian realist art.

After returning to South Florida, Rafael directed the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project and continues to advance community engagement as chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring for the Tropical Audubon Society. His efforts focus on expanding access to birding and habitat appreciation among underserved communities.

Now based in Homestead, Florida, Rafael divides his time between the Everglades, illustration, and guiding. A passionate teacher and field leader for over 15 years, he shares his love of birds through art, outreach, and his blog, 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.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: **$16,365** per person based on double occupancy or **$17,195** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 through dinner on Day 15, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the "TIPPING" sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT website or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is **$1,000** per person. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

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 120 days (February 21, 2027) prior to the tour departure date.

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.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If rates change drastically, it may be necessary to impose 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 have been passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, $5 to $10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) $15 to $20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit (including initial and second deposit)
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour**. This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to

obtain it through another provider. Please refer to the TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION section for additional information.

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: 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 comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit**.** With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; 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: **Ripcord Travel Insurance;** or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > 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, second deposit, 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 costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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.

About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: Medjet.com/VentBird or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: 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: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

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. 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 information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

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. We will make an attempt to process all our luggage as a group, and handle any overweight charges as one; in the past, when this is possible, we have found that our total group weight balances out, and fees are minor. VENT will cover the overweight fees of the

group as a whole. However, it is imperative that each traveler makes an earnest effort to keep within the weight limits when packing.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Mongolia is required.

VISAs: Visas are not required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of August 6, 2026, Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

CLOTHING: General clothing information

- **Layers:** 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
- **Warm Jacket**
- **Hat**
- **Gloves**
- **Long Underwear**
- **Rainproof Jacket or Pants**

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

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- **Backpack –** Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment, etc. This can be left at all times in vehicles for easy access, so you won't have to carry with you.

- **Polarized Sunglasses:** Bring a back-up pair as well.
- **Sunscreen**
- **Small Flashlight or Headlamp:** Essential for tour
- **Plastic bags –** Plastic bags are very useful for protecting equipment from rain and light dust.
- **Reusable Water Bottle**
- **Tissue packs and Handi-Wipes**
- **One Bath Towel & 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
- **Walking Stick:** Collapsible walking sticks will come in handy in several situations. They are strongly recommended for those with balance problems.
- **Small Folding Stool**

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 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, please feel free to do so.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

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: For the mere fact that few people ever travel to Mongolia, this tour will be an incomparable adventure! The magnificent landscapes of the Altai, and the diverse wildlife of the region are stunning. It is an extremely under birded region, so we always turn up exciting surprises when we visit. However, it is important to remember that Mongolia is an insular nation with a strong identity, developing at a pace quite different from what we often expect in the West. Patience is the key, when expecting human services in Mongolia. Cultural differences are vast, and they aren't as simple as language differences. It is important to remember that comparatively few Mongolians speak English, and that will be true also of most members of our local crews. Transactions, such as checking into a hotel or lodge, transferring from one location to another, or ordering at restaurants, may sometimes take longer, involve more people than seems necessary, and may take unpredictable turns. This is all part of the adventure that we need to embrace! We will be working with Mongolian ground teams in two different regions of the country. In all the years we have done this tour, they have always granted us safe passage to the best locations to find wildlife, fed us, and have delivered their trusted services to the best of their abilities. Just remember that we will be going to some very remote areas, and the way people express themselves and carry out their duties are different from how we do it at home. We hope that you will all embark on this adventure with an open heart and mind, ready for wonderful surprises and beautiful experiences, as we visit the birthplace of Chinggis Khaan - Mongolia - "Land of the Eternal Blue Sky."

The Ulaanbaatar Capital has experienced explosive growth in recent years, and is often mired by traffic jams, road closures and never-ending construction projects. After years of attempting to incorporate the capital as part of our VENT program, we have now completely excluded Ulaanbaatar from our itinerary. While we will be arriving at Chinggis Khan International Airport, and initially staying at the Mongolica Hotel, both within the Ulaanbaatar District, they are located outside the hustle and bustle of the city. However, you may notice construction debris or rubbish heaps as you arrive, signs of the growing pains affecting the capital region. While there are plenty of interesting sites, cultural landmarks and museums within the city, few of these could be visited in a single day due to traffic

delays. If you are interested in sightseeing through the capital, contact a third-party interpretive service, and expect to be very lenient regarding services rendered.



Ger camp in the Altai Mountains © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

ACCOMMODATIONS: Mongolia is not a typical tourist destination in the traditional sense. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is highly variable, ranging from good in and around Ulaanbaatar to more minimal away from the capital city. In the outskirts of 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 or insufficient. Although water and electricity services are expected throughout the day, it isn't unusual for blackouts to occur momentarily at any given point or for water services to be suddenly unavailable at one point or another. Patience is important when expecting these services anywhere in Mongolia.

In Terelj, we will be staying at a resort-style ger camp in a natural setting, with easy access to birding locations and beautiful views of the mountains. Although we try to reserve en-suite gers (see more about gers below) at Terelj, this is not always possible. Regardless, all gers are located near the facilities and restaurant. 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. Although some of the facilities are a bit old, the bathrooms and showers typically function quite well at this camp. The encampment includes a dining building where we will have our meals and is the only place where Wi-Fi internet connection is offered. However, be aware that the Wi-Fi service at this camp has typically been very weak.

In the Khovd Region of western Mongolia and in Hustai, we will be staying in traditional 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 bathroom stalls, 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.

FOOD & 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 always be available. 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.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: 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, extra gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. The currency of Mongolia is the Mongolian 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. There are currency exchange booths at the airport (typically open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), and money can also be exchanged at State Bank Tax Refund store fronts at the terminals. ATM's at the airport are the surest way of acquiring Tughriks. Bank notes

need to be in good condition as money changing places may refuse damaged or torn notes. Businesses may advertise that they accept credit cards, but be aware that at times, they only refer to Mongolian bank cards with a local pin number. VISA and American Express are most used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted.

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 ACCESS: Wi-Fi or the internet may only be available in our hotel in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. Even there it may be spotty or adequate for email and simple transmissions only; no web-streaming or video speeds should be expected.

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: 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is not guaranteed at all camps and hotels. Be aware that services are typically irregular and unpredictable in Mongolia and promised return dates may not be honored.

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.

ALTITUDE AND EFFORT: 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. Folding 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 flat, albeit sometimes sandy, dusty or rough, stony terrain. We may also be entering marsh edges with irregular, muddy ground, or tussocky and uneven understory, or even boulder fields. 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 that need personal assistance when walking will find the terrain of this tour challenging. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

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 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 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.

HEALTH & SAFETY

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.

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 for avoiding COVID-19.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A 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.

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.

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 it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must 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 Permanone 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.

https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

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** which has a wide selection; **www.buteobooks.com** and **www.nhbs.com** which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and **www.abebooks.com** for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Gombobaatar, S., C. Leahy. ***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

Batsaikhan, S. et al. ***Mammals of Mongolia.*** 2022. Mongolian Society of Mammalogy.

Excellent guide, and the most comprehensive for the region.

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.

BIRDING RESOURCES AND GENERAL NATURE:

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 AND CULTURE:

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.

CLO Apps

eBird. **Cornell Lab of Ornithology.** Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files. Highly Recommended.

Merlin Bird ID. **Cornell Lab of Ornithology.** Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birdwatchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions about his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app and the appropriate regional "pack." Highly recommended.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "***VENT***") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 6, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

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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