

SNOW LEOPARDS OF MONGOLIA

SEPTEMBER 1–15, 2020

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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.

For the first time, we present an opportunity to see the amazing Snow Leopard. Partnering with Ecotours Wildlife Holidays, we offer a wilderness-style experience amid the foothills of the Altai Mountains in 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-to-very good hotels and ger camps; good meals; and sensible physical demands.

Beyond Snow Leopards, this area 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.



From the mountains we'll 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 Gray Wolf. We will then continue west to the Manul Mountain in search of the charismatic Pallas's Cat, a small plush feline of the rocky steppe. For a grand finale we'll journey to Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve to witness the beautiful White-naped Crane.

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, White-headed Duck, Steppe Eagle, Asian Dowitcher, Amur Falcon, Azure Tit, White-winged (Güldenstädt's) Redstart, Long-tailed Rosefinch, and Pere David's Snowfinch in addition to waves of migrant waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds.

September 1, Day 1: International Flight to Ulaanbaatar. Most flights from the United States will depart the USA for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Chinggis Khaan International Airport (airport code ULN) on September 1 (Day 1), arriving at different times on September 2 (Day 2).

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Ulaanbaatar

September 2, Day 2: Arrive in Ulaanbaatar. Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar and clearing customs and immigration, you will be transferred to our hotel by our local agents. Early this evening we will meet 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 August 31 in order to be in Ulaanbaatar in time for the initial group meeting on September 2, 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 September 2.

NIGHTS: Onboard international flight (Day 1)
Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar (Day 2)

September 3, Day 3: 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 migratory songbirds. After our flight to Khovd we will transfer to our ger camp where we will stay for the next six nights. The camp, situated amid the Altai Mountains, 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.

The camp at Khovd is situated at the foothills of Jargalant Mountain, with the 12,450-foot summit on one side and Bumbat Mountain on the other side, and facing onto semi-desert with a lake and grasslands. In this stunning, remote landscape we are not likely to find any other human beings apart from our group and local crew. Although we will share basic facilities at the



Amur Falcon, male © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

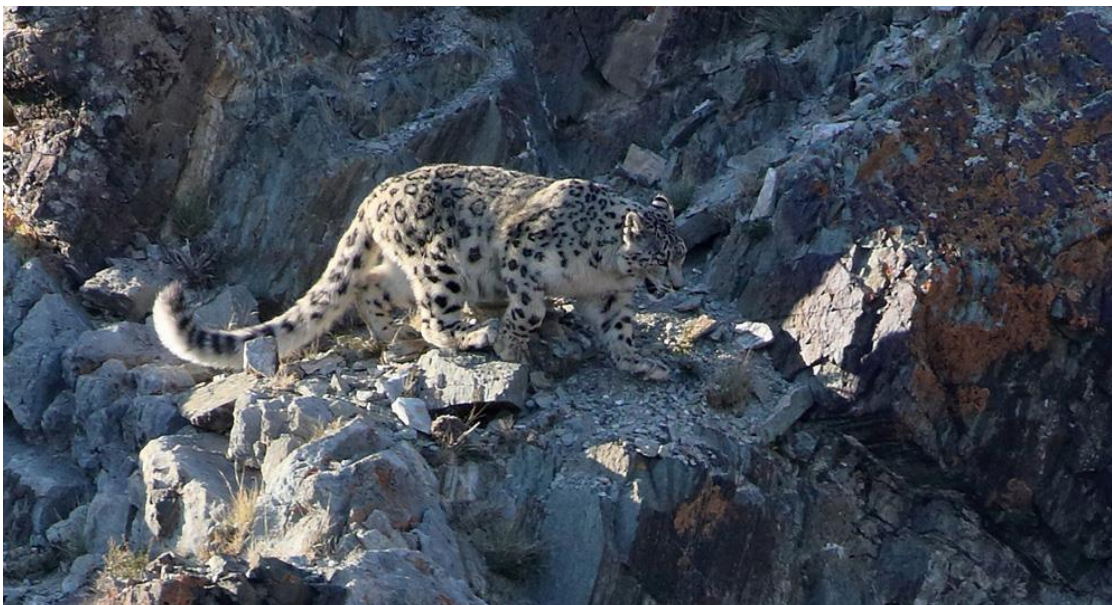
camp, the local team will be sure to provide everything necessary for our maximum comfort. Despite the isolation, our camp will be furnished with a spacious dining area, well-lit interiors and hot water in the morning and evenings. Black-eared Kites and Common Ravens patrol the area and Desert Wheatears are usually present along the surrounding slopes. Horned Lark is a common bird of the semi-desert and small flocks are regular here. With some luck, we may spot a Greater Sand Plover or Pallas's Sandgrouse near the camp.



Pallas's Sandgrouse © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

NIGHT: Ger Camp, Khovd

September 4-8, Days 4-8: 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.



Snow Leopard; Altai Mountains, Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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. 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 these realms, 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 Sheep 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) © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

Our experienced drivers will take us as close as possible to the observation sites. 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 Petronia, 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 Gray-necked Bunting. The bushes downhill attract migratory songbirds including Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow and Dusky warblers and Ortolan Bunting.



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 range and are 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.



Saiga (antelope) © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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While searching for Saiga, we have good chances of finding Pallas's Sandgrouse. Meanwhile, the lakeside is often a good place to observe Eurasian Spoonbill, Pallas's and Mongolia gulls, Caspian Tern, Greater and Lesser sand-plovers and other migrating shorebirds, plus many ducks. On the way to the lake we usually spend an hour in a small birch forest that in early September is a magnet for migrating songbirds. Past trips to this site have produced alluring species such as Black-throated and Red-throated thrushes, Taiga and Asian Brown flycatchers, Red-flanked Bluetail, Bluethroat, and Dusky and Yellow-browed warblers.

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 very memorable species to encounter. Siberian Jerboa is the commonest species here, but past trips have also produced Northern Three-toed and Mongolian (Andrew's) jerboas.



Siberian Jerboa © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

We will also 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, Ruff, Temminck's and Little stints and Red-necked Phalarope. Gray Heron and Great Egret are quite common here, and with persistence we may find small flocks of Eurasian Spoonbills.



Mystical Mongolian landscape © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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 flocks of Asian Short-toed Larks, migratory Richard's and Red-throated pipits, and Citrine and Western Yellow wagtails. Migrants will be on the move, and if time allows we may visit a nearby plantation in search of Dusky Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Siberian Stonechat, Blyth's Pipit and Eurasian Nightjar. We will also have an opportunity to appreciate the region's ancient cultural and spiritual heritage. One of these evenings we will be visited at our ger camp by a local group for a traditional song and dance performance.

NIGHTS: Ger Camp, Khovd

September 9, Day 9: Kvod to Ulaanbaatar. After bidding farewell to the magical landscape of Khovd, we will drive to the airport and fly back to Ulaanbaatar where our private vehicles will be waiting for us. We will soon 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.

NIGHT: Hustai Ger Camp, Hustai

September 10, Day 10: Hustai National Park. 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.

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. The large Mongolian Lark should also be present here. Hustai 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. Into the afternoon, we will continue west towards the Manul Mountains. Manul is the Mongolian name for the Pallas's Cat, a species we will search for in this region. This night we will be based out of a ger camp with similar accommodations as those described in western Mongolia.

NIGHT: Manul Ger Camp, Manul Mountains

September 11, Day 11: Manul Mountains. This region is composed of rolling grasslands, rocky steppe and a general lack of trees and shrubbery. Many of the species of birds and mammals described for Hustai are also possible here. However, our efforts will be focused on finding the charismatic Pallas's Cat, a species that prefers boulder outcrops where it stalks primarily for pikas, marmots and gerbils. This compact feline is characterized by the densest and longest fur of any cat species, marked with dark spots and stripes on an otherwise frosted pelage. Its large, forward-set eyes and rounded ears give it a memorable character. This vulnerable species has a distribution limited to Central Asia and the Middle East, with eastern Mongolia as an iconic stronghold.



Pallas's Cat © Milan Vogrin

As we search the boulder-strewn slopes, the nearby steppe will also give us an opportunity to find Eastern Buzzard, Saker Falcon, Little Owl and the large Mongolian Lark, as well as Daurian Pika, Mongolian Gerbil and Brandt's Vole. We will spend this night at the ger camp in these mountains.

NIGHT: Manul Ger Camp, Manul Mountains

September 12, Day 12: The lakes of the steppes towards Gun Galuut. We will leave the Manul Mountains and drive east past the capital city. We will then continue a couple of hours southeast towards the wonderful Gun Galuut Nature Reserve. On our way we will make a brief stop by a roadside theme park commemorating Mongolian horsemen, to marvel at a giant statue of Genghis 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 Gray-tailed Tattler. We may also encounter suites of common shorebirds, some of which we may have seen before but may also include Eurasian Curlew, Long-toed and Red-necked stints, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden-Plover and Marsh Sandpiper.



Demoiselle Cranes, Gun Galuut © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

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 "Siberian" White-winged (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.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomad Tourist Camp, Gun Galuut

September 13, Days 13: 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 migratory songbirds. In the past, these have been quite rewarding, rendering a variety of warblers including Pallas's Grasshopper, Greenish, Two-barred, Dusky and Thick-billed, as well as Olive-backed Pipit, Taiga Flycatcher, and Black-faced and Pine buntings. Surprises are a possibility and may not be limited to passerines. In 2017, Mongolia's third record of a Schrenck's Bittern was found along this stretch of riverside.

As we drive across the shortgrass steppe we may find several species of larks including Asian Short-toed, Horned and Mongolian larks, Isabelline and Northern wheatears, and Richard's and Blyth's pipits. We will particularly be on the lookout for the sandy colored Pere David's Snowfinch that inhabits the steppes. Raptors will be represented by Upland Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Black-eared Kite, Eastern Marsh Harrier, and Saker and Amur falcons. The rocky slopes are home to Rock Sparrow and Twite, while Pallas's Sandgrouse could be skulking anywhere in the area.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomad Tourist Camp, Gun Galuut



Crossing the wilds of Mongolia © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

September 14, Days 14: Return to Ulaanbaatar. After a final morning exploring near our base camp at Gun Galuut, we will return to Ulaanbaatar for a relaxing final day. If time allows, we may have the option of visiting the city in the afternoon.

NIGHT: Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

September 15, 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. So, 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.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants will be required to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Rafael Galvez and a local leader.



Rafael Galvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. 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. During that period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)*, which

he illustrated and coauthored. 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. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. Currently, he lives in Homestead, spends much time in the Everglades, serves on the Florida Ornithological Society's Records Committee, and is on the Leica Sport Optics Pro Staff. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$9550** 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 **\$645**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

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.

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.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your 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 www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

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.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), 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 (April 4, 2020) prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 180 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, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also apply to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, 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, 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.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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: 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 Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™**. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance** include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** 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.

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. 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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: 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.** 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. 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/>

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 quite cold at the ger camps, even in early September, and snow is also possible. Temperatures can change suddenly from hot to cold or vice versa. Several layers of clothing are much recommended as temperatures could drop below freezing. Particularly on the peaks of the Altai or in the open steppe, the wind can be piercingly cold so be sure to pack a good down jacket, warm sweaters or vests, a warm hat and gloves. Silk or synthetic thermal long underwear has been highly rated by participants during early morning and cold nights, so at least a light set is recommended. Sturdy, rainproof jackets and pants are strongly recommended (shower proof plastic jackets are not sufficient). For example, a single day during the last tour had below freezing temperatures with a light rain while we visited our first birding destination in the morning, which persisted for a couple of hours; yet by late morning temperatures were in the mid-80s°F and completely sunny.

Other items you may consider bringing include a balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, and scarf. Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one’s feet from hard surfaces are important. It is also useful if the socks are long enough so that the bottom of one’s pants can be tucked inside.

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 available 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. In September, the weather can be very changeable in Mongolia, especially at higher altitudes in the western Altai Mountains. On sunny days, 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 cold, with temperatures dropping to freezing. On the other end of the spectrum, the arrival of an early-season cold front may bring with it strong winds, rain, and even chances for snow. 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 regular tourist destination in the traditional sense. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is highly variable, ranging from excellent in Ulaanbaatar to more minimal away from the capital city. In Ulaanbaatar, we will stay in an attractive, modern hotel, while we will utilize ger camps elsewhere.

Gers are the traditional large round felt tents of the region, and the camps, almost like tented motels, are spacious and cozy and often heated by wood fires. All ger locations are situated at delightful sites located amidst lakes, steppe, desert, forest, and mountain scenery. At permanent ger locations, such as at Hustai and Gun Galuut, washing and toilet facilities are basic and consist of a separate toilet (happily, they are generally clean, western style facilities) and a building with hot showers.



Ger camp in the Altai Mountains © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

Each camp also has its own restaurant where soft drinks and beer are usually available. You should bring swimming trunks or a bathing suit to wear when showering. The ger camp in the Altai was built specifically for Snow Leopard viewing groups and has no permanent facilities. The camp is outfitted with two flush toilets each for men and women and a separate shower ger with hot water, for both men and women. Each ger has a small wash basin. Water is provided daily. Meals are served in a dedicated dining ger.



Ger camp: exterior and interior images © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

Altitude: Mongolia has an average elevation of 5,200 feet (1,580m), with its highest mountains rising to over 14,000 feet (4,300m). We will likely not ascend much over 7,500 feet (2,300m) except for one day when we may drive up to 12,100 feet (3,700m) to watch for Snow Leopard, Argali, and snowcocks. This excursion would only involve scanning the terrain for wildlife without any appreciable walking.

Overall, 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: 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 around the capital, we are unlikely to travel on anything other than dirt roads and sometimes bumpy and dusty desert tracks. At other times we will traverse dried up (in some cases not so dry) riverbeds, where many large boulders make the journey uncomfortable. 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 will be the occasional strenuous uphill walk such as when searching for the likes of Altai Snowcock. Elsewhere, we'll be wandering around fairly flat open landscapes at altitudes often around 6,500 feet (1,580m), making plenty of stops for birds.

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. Our experience indicates that this is a satisfactory amount of time to achieve success.

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 always will hope for the best, but flight delays of some type are probably inevitable. Under such circumstances, we will fill our time with birding on the grounds of 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 alternative accommodation for that night in order to avoid arriving very late at night at a dark and cold ger camp.

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.
- **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**
- **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.

- **Plastic bags** – Plastic bags are very useful for protecting equipment from rain and light dust.
- **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 was sufficient for some nights. Note that handy-wipes are available at the Altai ger camp and at meals, but it is always useful to have your own with you.
- **Tissue packs**
- **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.
- **One bath towel and washcloth:** Most of the ger lodges where we will stay have shared bathrooms where showers and sinks are available. Each person will be provided with a 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, 8x42, 10x40, 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 8x42 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/ 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 – A visa is not required for U.S. citizens visiting Mongolia for stays of fewer than 90 days. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. citizens may vary; please check with the appropriate consulates or embassies.

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 Tughrig (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 Altai camp, the generator will be on in the morning and again from 5 or 6 p.m.–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.

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.

HEALTH: No major vaccinations are required; however, as standard travel precautions you should always be up to date with vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases, including the **routine vaccinations**, which are Measles/Mumps/Rubella (MMR), Diphtheria/Pertussis/Tetanus (DPT), and Varicella (chickenpox). We also recommend vaccination against Hepatitis A and Typhoid, diseases of contaminated food/water; and Hepatitis B.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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.

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.

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.

Notes on medical care in Mongolia: Medical facilities in Mongolia are very limited and do not meet most Western standards, especially for emergency health care requirements. Ulaanbaatar, the capital, has the majority of medical facilities; outside of Ulaanbaatar medical facilities and treatment are extremely limited or non-existent. Specialize care for infants and the elderly is not available. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost thousands of dollars. **Therefore, VENT requires all tour participants to purchase a medical evacuation insurance policy. Please be aware of this before joining the tour. Furthermore, western doctors are few and far between, even in Ulaanbaatar.**

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. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 800-CDC-INFO (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: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

Birds:

Gombobaatar, S., A. Graulich 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.

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.

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.

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*. Dehli: 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.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, 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 such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger 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 passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in on November 14, 2019 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

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