

BIRDING IN THE GOBI, STEPPE AND HIGH MOUNTAINS OF MONGOLIA

(Date: June 2-16, 2025)



TRIP SUMMARY



The Gobi Desert and Central Mongolian grassland is home to some of the most diverse and endemic bird species of Mongolia. While exploring the valleys, slopes and ridges, one can encounter with a wide range of mountain species, including the impressive **Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier)**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Himalayan Griffon**, the impressive **Cinereous Vulture**, **Booted and magnificent Golden Eagles**, **Water Pipit**, **Black Redstart**, **Alpine**, **Brown** and the breeding nearly endemic **Kozlov's Accentors**, **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch**, **Twite**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Pallas's Reed Bunting**, **Common Rock Thrush**, and with a bit of luck, **Grey-necked bunting** and rare **Red-mantled Rosefinch** and **Spotted Great Rosefinch**.

At Yol valley for example, flocks of White-winged Snowfinches are regularly seen and can be very confident while feeding along the trail. Further north, Boon Tsagaan lake covers an area of 252 km² at 1,312 m above sea level. It has a length of 24km and a width of 11 km, with an average depth of 9.6 m. It is the largest of the Lake of Valley and also the primary site for watching Relict Gull, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Dalmatian pelican, Mute swan and various waterfowl and waders. The lake supports a number of globally threatened species and is an important area for their breeding and congregation before migration. The trip will conclude at Hustai National park, one of the best managed conservation areas in Mongolia with its own unique animal kingdom in Mongolia.

ITINERARY

DAY 1, JUNE 2 ULAANBAATAR



Ulaanbaatar is the capital of Mongolia, located on the basins of Tuul River valley. It is nestled on the foothills Bogd Khan Uul National Park on its southern part. Originally a nomadic Buddhist center, it became a permanent city in the 18th century. A Soviet-era influenced architecture co-exists with old monasteries and 21st-century highrises. Enjoy a short city tour followed by a welcome dinner at a fine local restaurant.

(Hotel Kempinski or similar; D)

DAY 2, JUNE 3 DRIVE TO THE GOBI DESERT

In the morning, we will begin driving south to the mighty Gobi Desert (7-8 hours). En route, we will stop to have a lunch at a road cafe. In the afternoon, arrive at the ger camp and overnight in gers. (Ger camp; B, L, D)

DAYS 3-4, JUNE 4-5 GOBI GURVANSAIKHAN MOUNTAIN / FLAMING CLIFFS



In the next two days, we will explore the magnificent Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park on the northern edge of the Gobi Desert. Our adventure begins with birding in the mountains, hiking up a narrow canyon surrounded by towering formations (2,600m). We may encounter species such as the nesting **Saker Falcon**, **Chukar**, **Chinese Beautiful** and **Common Rosefinches**, and migrating **Thick-Billed Warbler**, **Barred Warbler**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Brown Shrike**, **Brown and Alpine Accentors**, and **Blackfaced** and **Pallas's Reed Buntings**.

Our journey starts with a visit to Yol Valley in the Zuun Saikhan Mountain Range. While exploring the valleys, slopes, and ridges, we will look for mountain species, including the impressive **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Altai Snowcock**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Himalayan Griffon**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Booted** and **Golden Eagles**, **Water Pipit**, **Black Redstart**, **Alpine**, **Brown** and **Kozlov's Accentors**, **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch**, **Twite**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Common Rock Thrush**, and possibly **Grey-necked Bunting**, **Red-mantled Rosefinch**, and **Spotted Great Rosefinch**. We may also see **White-winged Snowfinches**, migrating raptors such as **Oriental Honey Buzzard**, **Amur Falcon**, and **Steppe Eagle**, and mammals like **Siberian Ibex**, **Argali**, **Pallas's** and **Alpine Pikas**, and **Midday Gerbils**.



On the second day, we will search for species missed previously and explore rocky slopes and small canyons near the camp. In the afternoon, we travel to the legendary Flaming Cliffs, where we may see Henderson's Ground Jay, Oriental and Greater Sand Plovers, and Goitered Gazelles. Named by Roy Chapman Andrews, the Flaming Cliffs are famous for dinosaur fossils and the first discovered fossil dinosaur eggs.

At a small oasis, we may encounter species like Pallas's Sandgrouse, providing excellent photo opportunities. The drive across the Gobi plains offers spectacular scenery, with chances to see Horned Larks and the elegant Oriental Plover. We'll enjoy the sunset and return to the ger camp for dinner. **(Ger camp; B, L, D).**



DAY 5-6, JUNE 6-7 KHONGORYN ELS SAND DUNES



After breakfast, we will continue our journey to Khongoryn Els, home to the largest sand dunes in the Gobi. These impressive dunes reach heights of 300 meters, span 12 kilometers in width, and stretch for 100 kilometers in length. Our drive will traverse fantastic barren landscapes and gravel plains, with the Gobi-Altai Mountains as a constant and majestic backdrop.

Khongoryn Els offers a spectacular setting, with rocky mountains to the south, vast sand dunes in the center, and a river oasis surrounded by an extensive saxaul forest to the north. Our main target birds here include the scarce and localized Saxaul Sparrow, the common Southern Grey Shrike, the enigmatic Long-legged Buzzard, and the Mongolian Ground Jay. This smart-looking bird favors gravel plains with scattered vegetation and spends much of its time running across the open ground in search of invertebrates. Additionally, there's a colony of Lesser Kestrels near our camp, providing us with the opportunity to study these fascinating small raptors over the next two days.

We will immerse ourselves in the beauty and biodiversity of Khongoryn Els, exploring its unique habitats and observing its remarkable wildlife. **(Ger camp; B, L, D).**

DAY 7, JUNE 8 KHONGORYN ELS SAND DUNES / OROG LAKE



From now on the wilderness adventure starts in earnest as we head north into even more sparsely inhabited area. Driving all day crossing rugged terrain of vast Nemegt valley for about 200 km! Stop for Saxaul Sparrow, Southern Grey shrike, Asian desert warbler and Mongolian Ground Jay (if not already seen) and White Cave (including a Lesser Kestrel colony). During the next few days we will visit the Valley of Lakes in the Central Asian internal drainage basin. The site is

designated as a Ramsar site with a chain of four saline and middle sized semi desert lakes (Boon Tsagaan and Orog) at the foot of the Gobi Altai, ranging from 1100m to 1235m in altitude. Arriving Orog lake early evening and setting up the camp at the northern foothill optional birding at the eastern shore is available. **(Tent camp; B, L, D)**

DAY 8, JUNE 9 OROG LAKE



We will spend a full day birding at Ikh Bogd Mountain, the highest peak in the Gobi Altai Mountains, revered by locals. The peak rises to 3,957 meters, with giant formations emerging almost vertically from the Gobi steppe. The landscape features steep slopes, rounded tops, flooded valleys, and rocky terrain with sparse vegetation, providing a stunning setting for our hike up to the ridge, beyond the reach of our vehicle.

If we missed the Altai Snowcock in the Zuun Saikhan mountains, Ikh Bogd offers another excellent opportunity to find it and other high mountain specialties. In the morning, we'll climb to higher elevations to search for **Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon, Altai Snowcock, White-winged Snowfinch, Grey-necked Bunting, Altai Accentor, Alpine Accentor, Guldensadt's Redstart, Brandt's Mountain Finch, Plain Mountain Finch, Chukar, and Mongolian Finch.** We'll also be on the lookout for the White-throated Bushchat, one of the rarest and globally threatened bird species, which breeds only in the high mountains of central and western Mongolia. Few birdwatchers have observed this species in its breeding grounds, making this a potentially unique sighting.

Additionally, we might spot impressive **Siberian Ibex and Argali (wild sheep)** in this remote area. From the ridge, we'll enjoy views of the expansive Gobi Desert to the south. We'll camp at the foothill of Ikh Bogd Mountain and, in the evening, head north through a spectacular gorge, descending towards Orog Lake.

(Tent camp; B, L, D)

DAY 9-10, JUNE 10-11 BOON TSAGAAN LAKE



For the next two days, we will drive to Boon Tsagaan Lake, a vast body of water covering 252 km² at an altitude of 1,312 meters above sea level. The lake stretches 24 km in length and 11 km in width, with an average depth of 9.6 meters. As the largest lake in the Valley, it is a prime site for observing the Relict Gull, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Dalmatian Pelican, Mute Swan, and various waterfowl and waders. The lake supports numerous globally threatened species and is crucial for their breeding and

congregation before migration. Our full-day excursions along the lake's shore will provide opportunities to explore this unique habitat. The surrounding landscape is sparsely vegetated semi-desert, fed primarily by the Baidrag River with no outflow. Boon Tsagaan Lake is one of the few key breeding habitats for the Relict Gull globally. Other species, such as the Great Cormorant, Common Tern, Mongolian Gull, Black-headed Gull, Grey Heron, and Caspian Tern, utilize this area in large colonies.

We will camp near the Baidrag River estuary, providing an ideal base for our explorations and birdwatching activities. **(Tent camp; B, L, D)**

DAY 11, JUNE 12 ARVAIKHEER CITY

After breakfast, we will head to Arvaikheer city in Uvurkhangai province, driving through the grassland region. We will have lunch at the restaurant in Bayankhongor city in Bayankhongor province. After lunch, we will do a short birding stop at Tuin river, located close to the city. Then visit to Arvaikheer city for overnight and overnight at hotel. **(Local Hotel; B, L, D)**

DAY 12, JUNE 13 ARVAIKHEER / SANGIIN DALAI / HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast, we will continue our journey. Another important site we are likely to visit today includes Sangyn Dalai lake, a small but bird-rich steppe lake. Here, there are large numbers of Whooper Swans and Demoiselle Cranes, but the most interesting denizens are Stejneger's Scoters (split from Velvet), **Horned Grebes and endangered Falcated duck in full breeding plumage. Around the lake margins, numerous Mongolian Larks, Pere David's snowfinch, Blyth's and Richard's pipit** can be found breeding.

We will also have a look at a couple of lakes where we could well find some other water birds of interest. Arrive at the ger camp and overnight in gers. **(Ger camp; B, L, D)**



DAY 13, JUNE 14 HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

Hustai National Park is about 100 km, 2 hours drive by paved road from Ulaanbaatar to the west. The park is the one of the three sites where Mongolia's wild horses known Przewalskii's horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*) was reintroduced to its native habitat. The last sighting of native wild horses in Mongolia took place in 1969, in Dzungarian Gobi Desert. Since 1992, wild horses have been successfully reintroduced to Hustai from zoos of Western Europe.



Aside the wild horses, the park

contains the largest Mongolian population of red deer and Siberian marmot. The site is one of the best protected areas in Mongolia. Here and on the way to Hustai you will see the birds that are common to the steppe zone: **Upland Buzzard, Demoiselle Crane, Isabelline Wheatear, Mongolian Lark, Black Vulture, Steppe eagle, Amur falcon.** We will stay in the gers overnight and dinner at the restaurant.

(Ger camp; B, L, D)

DAY 14, JUNE 15 HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK / ULAANBAATAR



After birding around the park, we will leave the site and return to Ulaanbaatar, checking in to a hotel for our last night in the country. The afternoon is free for individual sightseeing and shopping. In the evening, we will enjoy a traditional Mongolian performance followed by a festive dinner to celebrate our adventures in Mongolia. Overnight at hotel. **(Hotel Kempinski or similar; B, L, D)**

DAY 15, JUNE 16 DEPARTURE

After breakfast transfer to the airport for your return flight home. **(B)**

B = Breakfast | L = Lunch | D = Dinner

Ger camp = The traditional portable, circular, wooden dwelling used by the nomadic peoples.

Field camp = A bit more sophisticated camping/glamping, more permanent in nature.

Tent camp = Expedition style, often moving regularly and smaller in size and scale.

**MONGOLIA QUEST RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER THE ABOVE ITINERARY IF
DEEMED NECESSARY.**

LAND PRICES

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Based on 2 participants: | \$5,000 per person , standard twin occupancy; |
| Based on 3-5 participants: | \$4,560 per person , standard twin occupancy; |
| Based on 6-9 participants: | \$4,170 per person , standard twin occupancy; |
| Based on 10 and more participants: | \$3,980 per person , standard twin occupancy; |
| Optional single supplement: | \$650 per person , (including a single tent) |

***Please note:** As a part of our effort to support international and Mongolian research and conservation efforts, Mongolia Quest may decide to subsidize the trip cost for one or two students or rangers in joining this expedition. **They will not influence the tier pricing and only fully paid participants will determine the final per person price.**

| LAND PRICES INCLUDE: | LAND PRICES DO NOT INCLUDE: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land transportation as indicated in the itinerary based on using a 4x4 van and land cruisers; • Accommodation in standard rooms at hotel and standard ger camps throughout; • Expedition style tents, sleeping bags and mats; • Airport arrival & departure transfers; • All meals indicated as B, L or D; • All entrance fees as indicated in the itinerary; • Camel and horse riding fees; • Mongolian ornithologist or a study leader; • English speaking guide throughout your stay with local knowledge and experience; • One soda per person per meal; • Supply of bottled water per person per day based on consumption. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International airfare; • Personal laundry; • Drinks not mentioned in the itinerary; • Travel insurance; • Medical evacuation costs; • Excess baggage charges; • Visa fees; • Gratuities; • Photography and video fees • Any other item not mentioned as included. |

HOW TO BOOK THIS TRIP

You may book any trip with us by filling out our Trip Application Form, which you can download using Adobe Acrobat Reader and can send to us as an electronic file via e-mail at

- **Info@MongoliaQuest.com**

All reservations are subject to deposit of \$400 per person. Deposits are refundable until 90 days prior to the start of the program less a \$250 administrative fee. Please arrange a wire transfer to Mongolia Quest bank account as per following instructions:

Beneficiary name: MONGOLIA QUEST LLC

Beneficiary's address:

Suite #1205, Dalai Tower, 1st Horoo, 13th Sud-district, Sukhbaatar District,
Ulaanbaatar 14210, Mongolia;

Tel: (976) 7000 9747

Email: info@MongoliaQuest.com

Beneficiary's account number: 3005111070

Beneficiary's bank name: Golomt bank

Beneficiary's bank address:

Monnis branch

3rd floor, Monnis tower, Chinggis avenue

Khoroo #1, Sukhbaatar district

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Beneficiary's bank swift code: GLMTMNUB

Once we receive your trip application form, we will send you information about how to wire your deposit to us, and a confirmation letter with information related with visa and international airfare reservations. You will also receive our pre-departure Travel Guide, which will include information on weather, suggested reading list, a list of items to pack, etc.

About 4 weeks prior to your arrival date, we will send you Final Departure Information which will include your final itinerary along with any other necessary updated information regarding the logistics of your trip.

PAYMENT AND CANCELLATION POLICY

As mentioned above, a deposit of \$400 per person is required to reserve space for the trip that you have chosen. Full payment is due 90 days prior to the start of the trip. In the case of a cancellation, please contact us in written form.

Notification of cancellation must be received in writing by Mongolia Quest. At the time, we receive your written cancellation, the following penalties will apply:

- **Up to 90 days** prior to departure: **\$250 per person** handling fee;
- **89-60 days** prior to departure: **20% of the trip cost** per person;
- **60-45 days** prior to departure: **50% of the trip cost** per person;
- **44-30 days** prior to departure: **75% of the trip cost**, per person;
- **29 days** prior to departure, or after the trip starts: **no-refund**.

Some airfares may be nonrefundable. Once an expedition has departed, there will be no refunds from MQ for any unused portions of the trip. The above policy also applies to all extensions and independent travel arrangements made in conjunction with this program.

Tier pricing

Our prices are based on tier pricing. At the time of booking, we will bill you for the amount based on the confirmed number of trip participants. In case the number of travelers increases at the last moment, we will reimburse the balance of your payment in accordance with the corresponding tier pricing, after you return home.

***Please note:** As a part of our effort to support international and Mongolian research and conservation efforts, Mongolia Quest may decide to subsidize the trip cost for one or two students or rangers in joining this expedition. **They will not influence the tier pricing and only fully paid participants will determine the final per person price.**

TRAVEL NOTES

How to get to Mongolia

The official Mongolian international civil flight carriers Mongolian Airlines or MIAT. Currently it serves flights between Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Frankfurt. Other popular airlines include Asiana, Pusan and Turkish airlines. South Korea is the most common international gateway city to Ulaanbaatar. Mongolian Airlines and Turkish Airlines fly daily to/from Istanbul. If you are coming from Europe, you may also find Turkish Airlines a convenient connection. During the summer season, if no seats are available on any of these major carriers, there are ways to fly to Mongolia through local cities in China and Russia. Please contact us for more information. The seats are usually in high demand and booking needs to be done well in advance.

Visa Information

U.S, Canadian, Japanese, Australian and citizens of most European counties are allowed to enter Mongolia without a visa for up to 30 days. All other nationals are required to get a visa before entering Mongolia.

THE LIST OF THE COUNTRIES TO BE EXEMPTED FROM VISA REQUIREMENTS TO VISIT MONGOLIA UP TO 30 DAYS IN THE YEARS OF 2023-2025

- Czech Republic
- Republic of Austria
- Kingdom of Belgium
- Hungary
- Hellenic Republic
- Kingdom of Denmark
- Kingdom of Spain
- Italian Republic
- Republic of Latvia
- Republic of Lithuania
- Swiss Confederation
- Republic of Bulgaria
- Republic of Ireland
- Republic of Philippines

- Principality of Liechtenstein
- Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- Republic of Malta
- Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Republic of Poland
- Portuguese Republic
- Slovak Republic
- Republic of Slovenia
- Republic of Finland
- Republic of Croatia
- Canada

- Kingdom of Sweden
- French Republic
- Republic of Estonia
- Kingdom of Norway
- Republic of Iceland
- Republic of Cyprus
- Romania
- Principality of Monaco
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Commonwealth of Australia
- New Zealand

Weather

Mongolia enjoys over 280 sunny days a year. However, because Mongolia has a continental weather pattern, weather can fluctuate drastically during any given day. We recommend packing warm clothes even if you are coming during the hottest months. Our pre-departure information will provide details regarding the weather along with a suggested packing list. Layering is the best plan to be ready for a wide array of Mongolian weather patterns.

Accommodation



Newly renovated Soviet era hotels are located at some of the best locations in downtown Ulaanbaatar. They offer comfortable rooms and friendly services. There are also newer hotels like Kempinski Khan Palace, Ramada Ulaanbaatar and Best Western Inn. The countryside accommodations are arranged in “ger camps,” which provide authentic nomadic felt tents with centralized bathroom and toilet facilities located nearby. They offer clean, comfortable beds and plentiful meals.

Safety

Mongolia is devoid of any political, religious and ethnic sectarian conflicts and is considered one of the safest countries in the world for international travelers. However, like in any other country, crimes do happen, so a good sense of caution and respect shown to the locals can help to avoid unnecessary confrontations. Mongolians are generally hospitable people who love to interact with foreigners.

Food



Mongolia’s capital, Ulaanbaatar, hosts an excellent collection of fine restaurants of international cuisine. In the countryside, tour establishments offer hearty meals with a balance of meat and vegetables. Meat in Mongolians excellent in that the whole country is essentially “free-range” terrain. Even your strictest dietary restrictions can now be met with proper information in advance and preparation by us.

Information about Currency and Payment Methods

Mongolia's national currency is called tugrik and the exchange rate is about 3,400 tugrik to a US dollar. Major currencies can be exchanged at the hotels and pawnshops, and ATM machines are widely available throughout Ulaanbaatar and provincial centers. However, Australian dollars can usually only be exchanged at banks. Traveler's checks can be cashed at banks and major credit cards are accepted at most places in the capital, but only Mongolian cash is accepted in the countryside. We recommend that you travel with Mongolian national currency equal to at least \$200 when touring in the countryside.

Souvenirs

Like any other places, Mongolia offers great souvenirs ranging from camel wool sweaters to cashmere scarves and traditional wooden puzzle games. Mongolian vodkas can be an excellent gift. At several stores, you can also find a range of traditional Mongolian musical instruments such as the famed Morin Khuur or "horse headed fiddle." Bargaining is not very customary; most items are sold for the price on their labels. If you plan to shop for souvenirs, we recommend purchasing locally as many items as possible since your purchases will be a direct contribution to the local community.

Travel Insurance

With Mongolia stretching over 1.5 million square kilometers and its population concentrated in the cities, we will be traveling through some remote areas away from good roads and medical facilities. We strongly recommend that you consider getting standard emergency medical evacuation insurance as a means to protect yourself from unexpected accidents that can happen during any trip. Nothing is better than traveling with peace of mind knowing that you have prepared for the trip as much as possible in advance.

Traveling with Mongolia Quest

Because it is still a developing country, traveling in Mongolia requires a sense of humor and patience. New roads and bridges are being built every year, but the paved road system is still limited in the countryside. You may experience flight delays and find road conditions bumpy and dusty. But the experience of traveling in Mongolia will far exceed some personal compromises in comfort. We like to say that the best part of traveling in Mongolia is spontaneous events and interactions, which lead to unexpected interactions, discoveries, and experiences that will make your trip unique and memorable. At Mongolia Quest, we ensure the integrity of your overall itinerary but at the same time, will go out of our way to make necessary changes in order to enrich your travel experience with us.

ENJOY YOUR TRIP!