



TOUR INFORMATION FOR MONGOLIA

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING MONGOLIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for six months after the date of entry. From 1 January 2016 UK citizens need a visa to enter Mongolia. If you arrive in Mongolia with the wrong visa, the Mongolian Immigration Agency may ask you to pay for the correct visa, or they may deny you entry.

Visas need to be applied for in person at the Mongolian Embassy in London, or via an outsourced visa processing company. They require a passport with a validity date at least six months beyond the intended period of stay in Mongolia; a completed [Visa Application Form](#) for tourists with one passport-size photo; travel itinerary (provided by Sunbird), and insurance are preferable.

A tourist visa will be **valid 90 days** from the date of issue. Duration of stay in Mongolia will be maximum of 30 days, starting from the date of entry to Mongolia.

Our ground agent needs to issue a letter of invitation before you apply for a visa. It is therefore important that you email the Sunbird office a colour scan of the passport you intend to use on this tour – the page(s) with your photograph and passport details.

Please note that the Mongolian Embassy does not accept a cheque or credit/debit card as payment. Click on their website <http://embassyofmongolia.co.uk> or contact the Embassy directly for further information. Their Visa Section is open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to 12pm. Tel: 0207 937 0150

Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Embassy or Consulates for details, explaining that the tour is booked through Sunbird in England. Please check with your nearest Visa Office for the most up-to-date information. Many European countries do not have a Mongolian Embassy so people living in these countries may have to apply to the Embassy in London.

There are visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you however they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <http://visas.trailfinders.com> (tel: 0207 368 1504).

The Mongolian Border Agency may collect biometric data (scanned fingerprints) on your arrival.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...2

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Tugrikh (MNT). There is no limit on the amount of foreign currency you can take into the country but exchange bureaus will only be found in Ulaanbaatar. US dollars are acceptable at many places and you may want to bring a selection of small denomination notes for small purchases. Please note that Mongolian banks offer a worse exchange rate for US dollars of \$20 or under, they are also very particular about not accepting older US notes. We do not recommend taking travellers cheques.

TIME DIFFERENCE: During the tour Mongolia is 8 hours ahead of British Summer Time.

LANGUAGE: Khalkha Mongolian is the language spoken. Very few people speak English. Our Mongolian guide will, of course, speak adequate English.

CLIMATE: The continental weather in Mongolia can be very mixed at this time of year and you need to dress accordingly. Generally, it will be warm during the day but can be cold at night and in the early mornings. Cold weather can be expected at a few of the higher altitudes, and rain and strong winds are also possible at almost any time. At night temperatures could drop below freezing. During previous tours we have experienced temperatures ranging from -5°C to +38°C.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: In order to reach the various habitats and birds of this vast country, there will be a fair amount of driving. After driving on paved roads around the capital (personally the roads around Ulaanbaatar are more uncomfortable than in the Gobi!) we are unlikely to travel on anything other than dirt roads/desert for most of the tour. Often we will follow desert tracks, which can be bumpy and dusty. At other times we will cross dried up (in some cases not so dry) riverbeds where many large boulders make the journey uncomfortable. We will be using vehicles admirably suited to the purpose and making frequent stops, but some discomfort is inevitable.

Because of this, breakdowns, flat tyres, and getting stuck in sand, are possible. 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.

We will be wandering around fairly flat open landscapes, making plenty of stops for birds. Most of our time we will be above 1200 metres altitude with Yolyn Am at about 2300 metres. When we set up our own camps, our ground crew first help the cook set up, then erect common shelters (toilet tent) before erecting the group's tents while we go birding nearby. Under some situations (strong wind or rain) it may be necessary for us to help them. On those days when we are camping the daily routine to some extent will revolve around the need to set and break camp. Some days will consist of an optional walk before breakfast.

HEALTH: **It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations.

Biting insects can be common, especially around the lakes. Insect repellent (preferably with a high percentage of diethyltoluamide – DEET) will provide adequate protection.

Tap water is not safe to drink in Mongolia but we will carry bottled water with us, or use boiled spring water for making tea and coffee.

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...3

Upset stomachs are rare in Mongolia. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea. We will experience strong sun in several places so a good sunscreen and lip-balm is suggested. Sunglasses are highly recommended not just for the intense sun but also for the amount of wind blown sand we may encounter.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: In Ulaanbaatar we will stay in a modern 3-star hotel. Away from there we will divide our time between yurt (or gers as they are called in Mongolia) camps or pitch our own tents. Gers (pronounced like the English word 'gear') are the traditional large round felt tents of the region and the ger camps are almost like tented motels. Each ger has beds, bedding consisting of blankets, sheets, pillow, duvet and towels. Washing and toilet facilities at these camps are basic but do consist of separate toilet and shower buildings. Each ger camp also has its own restaurant where soft drinks and beer are usually available.

On some nights (4-6 depending on the internal flight schedule) we will sleep in tents provided by the ground agent, at prime birding locations or, on travel days, at suitable locations along our route. **Camping beds are provided and the tents are large enough to stand up in. Bedding is provided in the form of sheets, blankets, pillow, pillow case, duvet and towels. You will be issued the same bedding each night of camping. If you wish to, you are welcome to take your own sleeping bag.** Water is available for washing. Our ground agent provides both small and large towels.

When camping in the remote regions, our crew will erect a toilet tent, which consists of a sit down camping style toilet and 'flushing' with a spade and earth.

Tents: Our tents are tepee-style, large enough to walk around in and excellent against strong, desert winds. You will be required to share a tepee-style tent if you are not paying the single room supplement.

Ger Camps: At each of the ger camps we stay at if you have paid the single room supplement you will have a ger to yourself. Most gers are large and roomy and usually contain 2-3 beds, a table, chair and stove (only in the colder areas). They are large enough to walk around in, but care must be taken when entering as the doors are low. If you are sharing then a ger is treated like one hotel room, so there will never be more than 2 people in a ger.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Do not expect this to be available anywhere other than Ulaanbaatar (where we do not stay long enough to have laundry done).

ELECTRICITY: The current is 220 volts, 50 cycles. It is advisable to bring a plug adapter if you intend to take any electrical equipment (most sockets take a 2 pin European style adaptor). This can be bought in most airport departure lounges. Some of the tourist camps have sockets for charging batteries (often in the restaurant and not in the gers) although most are powered by generators that are turned off frequently.

FOOD: When we are travelling around the country virtually all the food we eat will be carried from Ulaanbaatar by the ground crew - as such many meals will rely on tinned and packet food. Breakfast will normally consist of juice, tea, coffee, bread, (including doughnuts, omelettes or fried eggs prepared by the cook), muesli, cheese, jam, and honey. Other meals will be a variety of salads and cooked meals especially soups, stews, pasta and rice.

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...4

Coffee and tea are provided by the ground crew. We will carry beer, and soft drinks with us but can not keep these chilled for a week. The red wine on the other hand should be just the right temperature! If you enjoy an after dinner whisky, or something similar, you may want to bring that with you.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we will carry enough drinking water for everyday use for everyone. Bringing your own drinks bottle for refilling will save on plastic waste. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: The only internet we are likely to find is during our night(s) in Ulaanbaatar. Away from the city even mobile phone access is very limited, although improving every year and available in most towns (keep in mind we don't see towns every day, the leader can advise when it is likely).

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout. Flexibility is the key. Warm, waterproof clothing, thermals, a hat and gloves will be needed in the higher areas and the desert at night. Fleeeces and sweaters may be required for the evenings when camping. Wearing several layers is often the best strategy. However, in the middle of the day lighter cotton clothing will be more comfortable here. As to footwear, trainers will often be adequate, but stout shoes or boots would be better for any rocky conditions and wet vegetation.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pen	Sun hat, sun screen and lip-balm
Small rucksack/day pack	Sun-glasses
Insect 'head-net'	Alarm Clock
Insect repellent	Personal medication
Torch with spare batteries (head torch for camping)	Ear plugs if you are a light sleeper

Optional: Telescope & tripod, camera, spare batteries & memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide. A sleeping bag or inner sheet for camping. Telescopes are a distinct advantage.

Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry.

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...5

This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope & tripod

Field guides & reference books

Basic first-aid kit

Ipod and speaker for playback

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

INTERNAL FLIGHTS: The luggage allowance for our internal flight to Dalandzadgad from Ulaanbaatar is only 15kg (which includes hand baggage), a surplus is charged for extra luggage (in 2016 this was about \$2.5 per kilo, only payable in Mongolian currency), but it is worth every penny to ensure you have sufficient clothing, toiletries etc. Delays are frequent on these flights and departure times regularly change. The internal flight schedule is only announced in the middle of the spring and can change at short notice. With this in mind the itinerary can always change and the leader and ground agent will ensure that we don't fly internally the day before our international flight, avoiding any risk of missing international flights.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Mongolia is a place of stunning scenery and wide-open vistas. There will be plenty of opportunities for landscape photographs. The birds can be quite approachable in some places but generally good bird photography will not be that easy. Please do not attempt to photograph local people without first asking our local guide.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However, if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Transportation is by bus. Our ground crew and driver are also skilled at solving mechanical problems. There is one internal flight. There are many long drives but these are broken by stops for birdwatching. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...6

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items.

You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

SHOPPING: Most of Mongolia's economy is based on natural products. Hand woven carpets, leather clothing and articles, woollen 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Aye, Raffael et al. 2012 *Birds of Central Asia*. Helm. Covers many of the species we will see.

Brazil, Mark 2009. *Birds of East Asia*. Helm. Covers many of the species we will see although its coverage doesn't extend very far west. MacKinnon, John & Karen Phillipps. 2000.

A Field Guide to the Birds of China. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Useful, but poor illustrations and almost all the Mongolian ranges are completely wrong.

Mullarney, Killian et al. *Collins Bird Guide*. 2010. HarperCollins. The 2nd edition is the latest, most up-to-date and portable field guide to the birds of Europe. This book has quickly become established as the standard field guide for Europe and covers many of the species we may encounter in Mongolia.

General Interest: There are a selection of guide books, novels, and historical accounts of Mongolia. Check with your nearest travel book shop.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MONGOLIA: Tour Information...7

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB: Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.orientalbirdclub.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions, please contact us.