



Sunbird

'The best of birdwatching tours'



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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. UK citizens need a tourist 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 (Tel: 0207 937 0150), 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 documents are preferable. You can post your passport, application form with a photo, and proof of payment to the Embassy bank account, direct to the Consular Section at the Embassy but you will have to collect it 'in person' or arrange to have it collected. The Embassy will not return a passport by post.

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

It is possible to obtain a visa on arrival, although getting it before you travel is always preferable. If you wish to pursue this option please contact the office.

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 – just 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.

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.

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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 some places we stay at 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.

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

CLIMATE: The continental weather in Mongolia can be very mixed at this time of year. Consequently you need to bring clothing to cover a range of conditions. Generally, it should be warm during the day but it can be very cold at night and in the early mornings with temperatures potentially dropping to freezing or below. However even during the day, cold to very cold temperatures can be experienced and cold weather can be expected at a few of the higher altitudes so you need to bring suitable clothing. Rain and strong winds are also possible at almost any time. During previous tours we have experienced temperatures ranging from -5°C to +38°C.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Apart from perhaps a few of the walks, this tour does not require high levels of fitness or stamina. Most of the walks are fairly easy and short over good ground. There will be a few long walks mainly through forest towards the end of the tour, some of which are uphill, but the pace is slow. We may not always be following paths and we may need to negotiate fallen branches and wet or boggy ground. On the day we drive up towards the summit of Ikh Bogd we reach an altitude of around 11300 feet or 3440 metres. Here we do walk around a little on a relatively flat plateau but there might be some gentle uphill walking.

In order to reach the various habitats and birds of this vast country, there will be a fair amount of driving and we spend a lot of time in the tour vehicles. Away from the capital we will be driving mostly on dirt roads or desert tracks of varying quality. At times we will be driving on very rough tracks which can be uncomfortable, although our 4x4 vehicles are admirably suited to the purpose. There may be one or two very early, pre-breakfast starts, but generally days begin with breakfast at 06.30 a.m. or 7 a.m. and usually end no later than 6 p.m. We try to allow an hour or more before dinner and checklist.

When we are camping, our ground crew travels ahead of us to set up camp. There will be no need for us to help set up camp.

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 with routine vaccinations.

Biting insects can be encountered especially around the lakes but are usually not too much of a problem. Insect repellent will provide adequate protection and while many use diethyltoluamide (DEET) which can be corrosive, and therefore require care when using, there are many less-harmful products on the market available from various camping supply stores.

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Tap water is best avoided for drinking but we will carry bottled water with us. Upset stomachs are rare in Mongolia but we suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret just in case. 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 and/or wind in several places so a good sunscreen and lip-balm is suggested. Sunglasses are highly recommended.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need. It is also worth mentioning that for much of the tour we are a long way from any good medical assistance.

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

ACCOMMODATION: In Ulaanbaatar at the end of the tour and for one night during the tour we will stay in a modern hotel. Away from there we will divide our time between Ger camps or our own tents. Gers (pronounced like the English word 'gear') are the traditional large round felt tents of the region (also known as yurts in other regions) and the ger camps are almost like tented motels. Each ger has beds, bedding consisting of blankets, sheets, pillow, and duvet. Towels are also provided. They have electric lights although sockets for charging may not be available in the ger. Many also have a wood burning stove which can be lit on request. Washing and toilet facilities at these camps are shared toilet and shower blocks with hot water. Each ger camp also has its own restaurant where hot drinks, soft drinks and beer are usually available. 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.

On some nights (usually 5) 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, duvet, blankets, pillow, pillow case 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 or sleeping bag liner. The camp beds are just about big enough for our 6'2" leader, but he actually prefers to take a 'thermorest' style camping mattress and sleep on the floor.** Water is available for washing. Our ground agent provides both small and large towels. Our tents are tepee-style, large enough to walk around in and excellent against strong winds. You will be required to share a tepee-style tent if you are not paying the single room supplement.

Our crew will erect one or two toilet tents, which consists of a sit-down camping style toilet. They will also erect a gravity-style shower tent and hot water can be provided for this. It's worth mentioning that for much of the tour we are travelling through very open country devoid of much cover. Impromptu 'bush stops' may therefore have to rely on using one of our vehicles as a sort of 'mobile bush'.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: This is only available at Jalman meadows at the end of the tour where we stay for 3 nights.

ELECTRICITY: The current is 220 volts, 50 cycles. It is advisable to bring a plug adaptor if you intend to take any electrical equipment (most sockets take a 2 pin European style adaptor, although a British 3 pin plug will also work in many places). Some of the ger 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.

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While we are using our own tents there will not be facility for charging. However it will be possible to charge camera batteries and mobile phones in any of the 4x4 vehicles we use throughout the tour via the cigarette lighter socket. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: When we are using our own camps, all the food is carried with us from Ulaanbaatar. The camp cook is very experienced in preparing a variety of meals 'on the road' and we are constantly surprised at the quality and variety of the meals provided. In the ger camps and at hotels the food is simple but very good consisting of a variety soups, stews, pasta and rice dishes. We also get some very good salads usually as a starter. The food is not spicy but is certainly plentiful. Coffee and tea are provided by the ground crew. We will carry beer, and soft drinks with us but cannot keep these chilled when we are in our own camps. Vegetarians are well catered for.

Our 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 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 places where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: The only internet we are likely to find is during our nights in Arvaikheer and in Ulaanbaatar. Away from there even mobile phone access is very limited, although improving every year. There are four network providers and it seems that only one will be available in a specific area, and this may not be compatible with your phone network. And even then there are some parts of the tour where we are too remote to receive any phone signal. It is not easy or straightforward to obtain a local SIM card on arrival.

FIELD CLOTHING: Flexibility is the key. Warm, waterproof clothing, thermals, a hat and gloves will definitely be needed in the higher areas and the desert at night. Fleeces or 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 maybe 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	Alarm Clock
Small rucksack/shoulder bag	Sun hat, sun screen and lip-balm
Dust proof bags for optics	Sun-glasses
Ear plugs if you are a light sleeper	Personal medication
Torch with spare batteries (head torch for camping)	Insect repellent

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Optional: A telescope and tripod are highly recommended for this tour. Also consider spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), a field guide, and a sleeping bag or inner sheet for camping if you don't want to use the ones provided by our ground crew. You may also find an insect 'head net' useful in case we encounter an usually high number of midges.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod

Field guides and reference books

Basic first-aid kit

Playback equipment

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.

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 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 4x4 vehicles. Our ground crew and drivers are also skilled at solving mechanical problems. There are many long drives however 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 or vaping 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.

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.

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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: Some of the ger camps have shops selling local crafts and/ in particular/ locally produced cashmere clothing. Some also sell books on Mongolia and its wildlife.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Gombobaatar, Sundev and Leahy, Christopher. 2019 *Birds of Mongolia*. Helm. Due for publication in August 2019, this is set to become the standard guide for the tour and will supersede the following books except the Collins Bird Guide. **Recommended**

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. Note: An excellent electronic version of this guide is available for digital devices at the Apple and Android "Apps" stores. Search for it under "Collins Bird Guide."

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.