Join us in the mountains of western Mongolia for the annual Golden Eagle Festival before traveling to the legendary fossil beds of the Gobi on this unique and exciting adventure.

Experience the wild scenery and traditional cultures of the Altai Mountains, where Kazakh nomads celebrate their magnificent hunting eagles in a thrilling two-day festival. Continue to the canyons and sand dunes of the Gobi, explore the Flaming Cliffs and Yol Valley, two of the desert's most scenic and fascinating destinations, as well as the towering sand dunes at Hongoryn Els.

Nomadic Expeditions’ Founder and CEO Jalsa Urubshurow founded the Berkut Association and the Golden Eagle Festival as a way to promote conservation of the Golden Eagle and preserve the traditional cultural heritage of Kazakh hunters. All proceeds from the festival’s ticket sales go to the Berkut Association, a community-based association consisting of local Kazakhs. They use the funds to further the goals of the organization, including the annual Golden Eagle Festival.
Day 1  
Wednesday, September 30  
WELCOME TO ULAANBAATAR

The contrast between ancient traditions and a 21st-century democracy is most visible in Ulaanbaatar, where traditional gers and Buddhist monasteries sit side by side with modern high-rises. Upon arrival at the airport you are welcomed by your Mongolian guide and transferred to a centrally located hotel within walking distance of various museums and shops.

Day 2  
Thursday, October 1  
ULAANBAATAR

Begin the day with a visit to Gandan Monastery, the seat of Buddhism in Mongolia. Woven through Mongolia’s nomadic culture is a rich Tibetan Buddhist tradition in which ancient shamanist practices are still evident. Although Buddhist monasteries were either destroyed or converted into museums during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, Gandan Monastery continued to operate as a showpiece for government officials. However, in spite of the government’s efforts to suppress Buddhism and other religious beliefs, Mongolia’s spirituality persisted and a significant resurgence of Buddhism began in 1990 when Mongolia became a democracy. Monastery doors across the country are again open to worshippers, and the few lamas who survived the purges are training a new generation.

Strolling through the monastery grounds, hear the low tones of the horns used to call the lamas to the temple and observe their daily rituals, including the reading of sutras, the teachings of the Buddha. Also visit the recently renovated Chenrezi and Kalachakra Temples, as well as the magnificent statue of Migjid Janraisig, “the lord who looks in every direction.” This 82-foot high statue, gilded in pure gold and clothed in silk and precious stones, completely fills the largest of Gandan’s temples.

After visiting the temples, drive through downtown Ulaanbaatar to the National History Museum for an excellent overview of Mongolia’s history and culture. The newly remodeled museum displays traditional implements of daily nomadic life including Stone and Bronze Age artifacts, historical costumes of Mongolia’s minority tribes, sacred religious relics, and agricultural, fishing, and hunting equipment.

Following lunch, visit the Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum. Named in honor of Zanabazar, the renowned 17th century artist and politician, who was also the first Buddhist leader of Mongolia, the museum contains one of the best collections of Buddhist art and artifacts in the world, including any of Zanabazar’s original works. Overnight at hotel.

Day 3  
Friday, October 2  
FLY TO BAYAN-ULGII | TOLBO LAKE

Transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Ulgii (3.5 hours), capital of Bayan-Ulgii, Mongolia’s westernmost province. Ninety percent of the population of Bayan-Ulgii is Kazakh, Mongolia’s largest ethnic minority. The isolation of the Altai Mountains has preserved the language and traditions of the Kazakhs, who live amongst some of the most spectacular scenery in Mongolia.

Drive to crystal-clear Tolbo Lake, which mirrors the dramatic Khunguin Mountains. This saline lake attracts numerous birds such as swans and gulls, and is home to over eight different types of fish. Spend the day trekking along the eastern shore of the lake, visiting Kazakh families along the way.

There will also be a chance to visit a traditional Muslim burial tomb, a walled compound built from adobe and stone, and for an optional visit to an Uriankhai family, who are famous for their archery skills.
If time permits, we will visit a Kazakh eagle hunter’s family with the chance to view local crafts. Kazakh craftswomen are renowned for their colorful embroidery and textiles, and their gers are beautifully decorated. Handcrafted felt carpets line the floor and delicately embroidered tapestries adorn the walls of their homes, with each design unique to a particular family. Return to the ger camp for an overnight stay.

**Day 4**

Saturday, October 3

**COMPETITION | OPENING CEREMONY**

The official opening ceremony commences with the participants parading in on horseback with their eagles. The competition begins with each Kazakh hunter displaying his hunting outfit and accessories, the most elaborate and beautiful of which receive the highest points. In the afternoon, the golden eagles will be evaluated for their speed and agility. The eagles will be released from a cliff while their owners stand below, signaling for them to land upon their arms, as they do while hunting. Those with the fastest times and best technique will be awarded the highest scores. After dinner, attend a special performance of traditional Kazakh dance, song, and music organized in honor of the competitors. Overnight in gers.

(Temporary Ger Camp; B, L, D)

Day 5

Sunday, October 4

**COMPETITION | AWARDS CEREMONY**

In today’s competition, the golden eagles will be released from a cliff to attack fox skins dragged by their owners on horseback. The eagles will be judged on speed, gripping technique, and success in grabbing the fox. As the points for the competitions are tallied, the Kazakh hunters will compete in a traditional game called kukbar, a tug-of-war on horseback that tests horse-riding skills, strength, and agility. There will also be two horse races and displays of various traditional horseback Kazakh games, including Tenge ilu, which involves picking money up from the ground in a full gallop, and Kyzguar, which young men and women play as a way to getting to know each other better. In the late afternoon, the winners of the festival will be announced at the awards ceremony. Enjoy a celebration dinner in the evening.

(Temporary Ger Camp; B, L, D)

Day 6

Monday, October 5

**BAYAN-ULGII | ULAAンBAATAR**

Transfer to the airport for a return flight to Ulaanbaatar. Check in to your hotel upon arrival and spend the afternoon at leisure. In the evening, enjoy a performance featuring traditional Mongolian dancers and khoomi throat singers, followed by dinner at a fine local restaurant.

(Shangri-La Hotel; B, L, D)

Day 7

Tuesday, October 6

**GOBI | MOLTSOG ELS SAND DUNES**

In the morning, transfer to the airport for a flight to the Gobi (1.5 hours). Contrary to the sameness that the word ‘desert’ suggests, the Gobi is a fascinating and diverse region, and includes sites
of some of the most important paleontological discoveries of the 20th century. For the next few days, explore the stunning landscape of the Gobi, habitat for Bactrian camels, Argali mountain sheep, goitered gazelle, golden eagles, saker falcons, jerboas (similar to kangaroo rats), and many endemic reptiles. The Gobi is also home to some of the Northern Hemisphere’s most rare and elusive mammals, such as the dhole, snow leopard, Gobi bear, and the wild Bactrian camel.

Upon arrival, drive to the Three Camel Lodge, Nomadic Expeditions’ luxury ger camp located near Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. After lunch, drive to Moltso Els, one of the few regions of the Gobi covered by sand dunes. Explore the sand dunes on foot or atop a Bactrian camel. You will also have the opportunity to visit a local camel herding family and experience their hospitality and way of living.

Day 8
Wednesday, October 7
HAVSGAIT PETROGLYPHS | FLAMING CLIFFS

In the morning, drive to the Havsgait petroglyph site (Note: it is a steep hike over loose gravel). Hike up the side of a local mountain to a site home to hundreds of stone carvings from the Bronze Age. After lunch, visit one of the local families for a display of nomadic culture, including the making of dairy products, daily chores of tending animals, and work around the ger.

Later this afternoon, continue driving to the legendary Flaming Cliffs, named for the orange glow of the rock at sunset. It was here in 1923 that Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews and his exploration team from the American Museum of Natural History found the first nest of dinosaur eggs the world had ever seen. Although not obvious to the untrained eye, the red sandstone of the Flaming Cliffs is rich with dinosaur fossils, and paleontological expeditions continue to make significant discoveries at this site. In the evening, return to the Three Camel Lodge for an overnight stay.

Day 9
Thursday, October 8
YOL VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

In the morning, drive to the Yol Valley National Park (2.5 hours). Located in the northern part of the Gobi in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, this surprisingly green valley was carved by an ancient river. Its remnant streams now create ice formations at

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the base of the valley that sometimes persist as late as July. Hiking through this deep canyon leads to the habitat of indigenous Lammergeiers, vulture-like birds that feast mostly on the carcasses of dead animals. However, unlike other such birds, whose diets mainly consist of meat, Lammergeiers primarily feed on bone marrow, dropping large bones from the sky to break them into smaller pieces.

(Three Camel Lodge; B, L, D)

Day 10
Friday, October 9
ULAANBAATAR

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for the return flight to Ulaanbaatar (1.5-2 hours). In the afternoon, visit Bogd Khan Winter Palace museum, home of Mongolia’s last theocrat, Bogd Jabzan Damba Hutagt VIII. The museum displays elaborate ceremonial robes and other personal effects of “Mongolia’s 8th Living Buddha.” Spend the rest of the day at leisure.

Dinner is independent. Overnight at the hotel.

(Shangri-La Hotel; B, L)

Day 11
Saturday, October 10
GORKHI-TERELJ NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast, drive to nearby Gorkhi-Terelj National Park (1 hour). Comprised of the southern Khentii mountain range, this mountain, forest, and steppe region serves as a habitat for a variety of bird and plant life. Also sheltered in this protected area are endangered musk deer and moose, brown bear, roe, elk, wolf, fox, and badger. Upon arrival, embark on an adventurous hike towards the Aryabal Monastery. A hike up along a steep road leads to a wooden suspended bridge known as “The bridge that leads to wisdom.” After crossing the bridge, trek up 108 steps to finally arrive at the temple. Along the way, the path is lined with signboards displaying Buddha’s teachings. The monastery is special for its spectacular views of the surrounding green valley.

Return to Ulaanbaatar and en route stop to visit the Chinggis Khan Equestrian Statue. The massive statue made of 250 tons of gleaming stainless steel will take your breath away. Once inside the two-story base of the statue, visitors can see a replica of Chinggis Khan’s legendary golden whip and also take an elevator to a deck on the horse’s head and marvel at the surrounding area overlooking the beautiful Mongolian steppes.

In the evening, enjoy a farewell dinner at a fine local restaurant. Overnight at the hotel.

(Shangri-La Hotel; B, L, D)

Day 12
Sunday, October 11
DEPARTURE

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for departure.

(B)

Nomadic Expeditions reserves the right to change the above itinerary if necessary.
LAND PRICE INCLUDES:

- Ground transportation in Mongolia as described in the itinerary;
- Transfers on arrival and departure;
- All accommodations based on double or twin occupancy (hotel rooms and gers);
- Meals as noted in itinerary;
- Horse and camel riding as noted in the itinerary;
- All excursions, entrance fees, and visits as described in itinerary;
- Extensive pre-departure Travel Guide, reading list, important information about your trip, map and luggage tags;
- Bilingual Nomadic Expeditions guide throughout your stay.

LAND PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- International airfare
- Internal airfare is quoted separately
- Tips to guide and drivers
- Passport and visa fees
- Comprehensive medical and trip insurance; airport taxes
- Excess baggage charges
- Photography and video fees
- Food and beverages not included in the group meals
- Items of a personal nature, including alcoholic beverages, laundry and telephone calls
- Other items not specifically mentioned as included

WHY TRAVEL WITH NOMADIC EXPEDITIONS?

Unrivaled Expertise

Nomadic Expeditions was founded in 1992. Nothing can compete with the experience we have attained over 25 years of designing luxury adventure travel to Asia. While each trip we design is slightly different than its predecessor, our breadth of knowledge, network of contacts, and experience in the field is unrivaled.

Our People

We hire the best in the business to create and execute memorable journeys for our clients. From our Expedition Specialists in the United States, Ulaanbaatar, Lhasa, and Thimpu who turn wish lists into reality to our English-speaking, professionally trained guides who share their extensive knowledge of the culture and natural history of our destinations, our staff is what makes Nomadic Expeditions successful.

Passion for Travel

While our journeys open your eyes to a whole new world of experiences, we understand that choosing to book a trip with us requires time spent away from friends, family, and work. Your time is precious and we take that to heart. It's why we design journeys that go beyond a checklist of attractions. When you travel with us, we want you to remember drinking tea with a nomadic family or digging for fossils with a renowned paleontologist. We imbue our trips with encounters, whether it's with a local resident, a high-ranking government official, or a renowned wildlife conservationist, so you take home more than a set of photographs to frame on your nightstand.

Our Philosophy

Nomadic Expeditions was founded on the principle of treading lightly long before sustainable travel was a buzz phrase. Every expedition is undertaken with the greatest respect for the lands we explore and the local people we meet. Those who travel with us do so with the assurance that the preservation and protection of the ecosystems and cultures we visit is of the utmost importance to us, both as individuals and as a company. Respect for the places we travel to is at the heart of everything we do, but over our 25 years we have realized additional opportunities where we can lend a hand. We have gone beyond simply treading lightly and have wholeheartedly partnered with local communities and regions. Read more about our sustainable practices and philanthropic efforts here.

We would love to share this exceptional adventure with you!

Our Expedition Specialists are available from 9:00 AM- 5:00 PM EST, Monday thru Friday

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