

Our Mission Statement

Mongolia has come late to the world of international tourism, but already there is a well-recognised tourist trail and areas of over-development. Within this vast land, we seek out the most remote, least-developed places to find the true Mongolia. Our guests have the rare privilege of being able to experience a unique culture unaffected by tourism and the outside world, travelling through rarely-visited wilderness areas.

With this comes a heavy responsibility to see that our impacts and any tourism development we bring, happens in a way that benefits the local people and environment. We believe that tourism can be a force for good in Mongolia, if done the right way.

Our partnership between New Zealand and Mongolian friends combines an understanding of what adventurous travellers really want, with in-depth knowledge and respect for the local culture. Our team is made up of 'real' Mongolians from the countryside, rather than professionals from the tourism industry. They and their friends and family are the best people to introduce you to their land and culture. Our small-group 'non-itinerised' style of travel rewards those who are prepared to leave the comforts of home far behind and take the road less travelled.

Commitment to Environmental Sustainability

Our Office

Our responsibility to the environment begins in our New Zealand-based office, which is almost entirely paperless. In this age of ipads and smart phones, we feel there is no need to produce printed brochures or other materials. All necessary pre-trip documentation is sent to our guests by email.

Wildlife

Mongolia has an incredible variety of wildlife but it is increasingly under threat. By bringing our guests to remote areas to view the wildlife we hope to demonstrate to local people that there is value in conservation. Employing local people creates a financial incentive for conserving wildlife. We recognise that the challenge is to extend this incentive beyond those we employ directly.

Wildlife Monitoring Project

In 2013 we began a Wildlife Monitoring Project in the Altai Mountains where we ride. Up until recently the UNDP were running a project aimed at protecting the globally significant biodiversity of this area. As part of the project local herders were paid to ride a defined route through the mountains and record the wildlife they encountered, on a regular basis, as a way of monitoring the numbers of animals present. Unfortunately at the end of the project, along with the funding, the monitoring ceased. We are re-establishing the monitoring project, by riding out with the local herders to record and monitor the wildlife. Read more here: [Altai Wildlife Monitoring Trek](#)

It goes without saying that it is not acceptable to buy wildlife products as souvenirs in Mongolia. Most products, such as wolf skins, are obtained and sold illegally. We point our guests to handicraft shops in Ulaanbaatar that support charitable projects, such as the non-profit cooperative Tsagaan Alt Wool Shop.

Recycling and Rubbish Disposal

We encourage the use of rechargeable batteries. On all trips we carry an inverter in order to recharge batteries, and to charge devices such as cameras directly, so there is no need to bring non-disposable batteries to Mongolia. However if non-disposables are used, we ask that they be taken back out of the country so they stand a better chance of being recycled.

In recent years plastic bottles have become a blight in Mongolia, so we avoid their use. In most areas where we travel the stream water is fine to drink. When necessary we provide boiled or filtered water for our guests, but not bottled water.

If we do end up with plastic bottles or empty food jars it is accepted practice to recycle them by giving them to herder families. These containers are very useful for storing milk and yoghurt. Any non-burnable and non-recyclable rubbish is collected and disposed of as appropriate. This does unfortunately often mean burying it,

since small towns we pass through do not have rubbish disposal facilities.

An urbanised Mongolian middle class is beginning to return to the countryside on holiday, which can result in easily accessible scenic beauty spots becoming spoiled by rubbish. We try to set a good example by gathering up rubbish when we stop at such spots.

Water conservation

Low population density and a traditional respect for water has kept streams and lakes in remote areas clean and safe to drink. We encourage swimming, but not washing directly in water sources. Washing bowls are provided for personal washing, and for laundry. Biodegradable soap is preferred.

When camping we dig a toilet hole, and ensure it is well away from water. Our drivers are prohibited from washing their vehicles in rivers – an all too common practice.

Other considerations

Our drivers are expected to drive on formed tracks whenever possible, to minimise damage to fragile environments. By moving on each day, we minimise our impact on the immediate area in terms of firewood use and grazing for livestock.

Benefits to the Local Economy

Tourism is a small but growing part of Mongolia's economy (around 10%), however the benefits are not spread equally across the country. We specifically started taking our guests to the least-visited regions partly in order to benefit their local economies. It does help that these tend to be the most interesting and remote areas, where we can experience the real Mongolia! We do not run trips to the areas where tourism is already well-established such as Lake Khovsgol and the main Gobi tourist sites.

Staff

Our company is a long-term partnership between New Zealanders and Mongolians. Our Mongolian team consists of local people born and bred in the areas where we ride, which is key to the success of our trips. They are comfortable in remote countryside and understand the traditional nomadic lifestyle. Visiting their family and friends in the area gives us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the culture in a wonderfully 'non-touristy' way. Our treks are accompanied by a western trip leader, who is able to bridge the cultural gap between our guests, and the local team and herders. They are people with specialist knowledge and experience of Mongolia, including New Zealand co-owner John.

We pay our staff well, so they do not need to rely on tipping in order to make a living. We advise our guests about tipping (which is not obligatory).

We avoid employing people from the tourism sector in Ulaanbaatar, who are often urbanised and unfamiliar with countryside life. The cultural gap between such people and the nomadic herders can be quite large. It also helps direct money to the local economy where it is needed most.

Supplies

By necessity most of our food supplies come from urban centres, as there is little available for sale in the areas where we travel. However we often trade or buy meat and dairy products from nomadic herders along the way. We endeavour to do this sensitively, within the cultural norms of Mongolian hospitality (offering payment can be seen as offensive). Our horses are also supplied by families who we have been working with for many years. This helps to spread the economic benefit of our trips beyond our immediate staff.

Training

Most people in the areas we operate are part of a subsistence economy, with few formal jobs. By providing employment within our business we hope to also teach new skills that may be transferable.

Social Responsibility

We are lucky to be able to travel in areas where there is no tourism, and life remains very traditional. Nomadic herding is still the main livelihood, and the outside world has had little impact. We are highly aware of our responsibility to minimise any negative impact on this culture, and to be of benefit where possible.

By keeping our groups small (max 10 people), and only running around four trips to the same area in a season, we hope to keep our overall impact on the local people low.

The nomadic culture has a bewildering range of dos and don'ts and codes of behaviour. This includes such things as never pausing on the threshold of a ger, never passing a knife point-first, and always receiving and passing items with your right hand while supporting your elbow with your left hand. Our guests are advised on appropriate behaviour to avoid causing offence (or simply to avoid being laughed at) .

When appropriate, we offer suitable gifts to families we are visiting or staying with. We make sure our guests know it is not appropriate to hand out sweets and other gifts to children as we pass by. We wish to avoid creating an association between foreigners and handouts, as has happened elsewhere in the world.

Community Garden

In 2010 we set up a community garden project in the village where our treks in the Altai Mountains are based. We wanted to give something back to the wider community, rather than just to the people we employ, and this is what they asked us to do. We use 5% of the trip price for all participants on our Altai rides to fund the project.

We are up against a vegetable-unfriendly climate, no soil to speak of, and lack of local knowledge. It has been a slow process, and is still developing, but we have high hopes. So far we have established a large walled plot, arranged a study tour to an established garden in the region, and made trial plantings. We are looking forward to a harvest in 2013.

Read more about our project here: [Altai Community Garden](#)

Donating medical equipment and clothes

Mongolia's provincial health services are typical of post-socialist countries - well-trained staff but limited and out-dated equipment. We encourage our guests with connections in the health care industry to bring used/expired medical equipment which we donate to the small hospital near where we ride.

We suggest that guests with space in their luggage might like to bring children's clothes and shoes to donate to Lotus Children's Centre in Ulaanbaatar. We also offer their guest house as a good option when staying extra nights in Ulaanbaatar before or after a trip. Some of our guests have also extended their stay in Mongolia by volunteering at the Lotus summer camp, near Ulaanbaatar.