

MONGOLIA:

Land of Blue Skies and Limitless Horizons

***May 26 – June 10, 2012**

Lake Hovsgol: Exploratory Extension

June 10 – 16, 2012

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The fabled lands of Mongolia conjure images of vast, seemingly limitless horizons, sparsely populated by nomadic horsemen and graced with saffron grasslands. The range of habitats surprises everyone and includes high jagged mountains—the Altai Mountains are surely some our planet’s most spectacular; endless taiga forests; huge freshwater marshes; and a myriad of grassland types. And all this caressed by a night sky the like of which I promise you have never, ever encountered anywhere else. Above all Mongolia is a wonderfully exciting mix of great traveling experiences, absorbing history and prehistory and some magnificent wildlife.

The name “Mongolia” has always stirred up visions of the untamed and exotic—the warlord Genghis Khan, camels wandering in the Gobi Desert and wild horses galloping across the steppes. Even today, Mongolia seems like the end of the earth; outside Ulaanbaatar you begin to wonder if you haven't stepped into another century, rather than another country. It remains one of the last great adventure destinations in Asia. Mongolia’s survival as an independent nation is little short of miraculous. For the first time in centuries the Mongolians, once rulers of the vast Eurasian steppe, are no longer colonial subjects of the Russian and Chinese empires. Only a century ago, so few Mongolians were left that it seemed their ancient, nomadic civilization might disappear altogether. Now the country has a constitution, multiparty elections and a ruling democratic coalition.

Lying at the heart of the vast continent of Asia is Mongolia, the land where nomadic horsemen still ride across windswept steppes, where Shamanism and ancient Tibetan Buddhism still flourish and where, according to legend, lies the last resting place of Genghis Khan, leader of the once great Mongol empire. This exotic country is full of natural wonders. The vast Gobi Desert, which covers one third of Mongolia, the endless steppes strewn with thousands of lakes, the picturesque Altai mountains and the rich taiga forest—all remote, beautiful, fascinating and full of birds.

Our trip will be more than just another birding tour—it will be a true adventure. From the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, we’ll travel out into a forgotten land, much of it unchanged for centuries. As befits a culture famous for its nomadic way of life, we shall camp as we go, albeit largely in very comfortable Gers, or stay at one or two very attractive lodges. We’ll gaze on stunning landscapes seen by few Westerners, and on birds most birdwatchers can only dream about: Upland Buzzard, Amur Falcon, Altai Snowcock, Black-billed Capercallie, Pallas’s Fish-Eagle, Oriental Plover, Relict Gull, Pallas’s Sandgrouse, Mongolian Lark, Blyth’s Pipit, Kozlov’s Accentor... the list goes on.

*** Please note the dates have changed since the publication of the 2012 VENT catalog.**

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Our ground agents are skilled at showing this wonderful country to groups. We'll travel in vehicles admirably suited to the terrain and stay in superb camps that are testament to their nomadic heritage. We'll mingle with the locals tending their flocks of sheep and cattle, much as they have done for centuries, and we shall walk along pathways few have trodden.

May 26-28, Days 1-3: Travel to Ulaanbaatar. Travel from the United States to Mongolia so that your flights arrive Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Chinggis Khaan International Airport (airport code ULN) by mid day on May 28 will need to depart the US on May 26 with flights generally travelling through Beijing China or Seoul Korea. Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar, we will transfer to our centrally located hotel within walking distance of the capital's expansive main square and various museums and shops.

For those clients travelling through Beijing and wish to add some extra Chinese time to your trip, a three day optional pre trip with David Bishop is arranged beginning in Beijing on May 25 ending on May 28. We will plan to visit Tiananmen Square, one of Beijing's most famous landmarks and has been witness to many of the most tumultuous events in the country's history. The square is bordered by the National Museum, Mao's Mausoleum and the impressive Great Hall of the People. Other excursions where birding will be included are with visits to the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace and of course the Great Wall. A visit to Wild Duck Lake will also turn up a number of birds. Please contact the VENT office for details.

Once you arrive in Ulaanbaatar, we will spend time exploring the willow-dominated Tuul River and the adjacent grass-covered Zaisan valley where we will gain our first experience of the Mongolian avifauna. Some of the birds we may see include several breeding species such as Ruddy Shelduck; Black Kite (of the form *lineatus* which is sometimes considered to be a separate species viz. Black-eared Kite); Blue Hill Pigeon; Pacific Swift; Common Cuckoo; House Martin; lovely Citrine, Pied and Gray wagtails; Richard's Pipit; dapper Isabelline and Northern wheatears; Lesser Whitethroat; the attractive Azure Tit; charming White-crowned Penduline-Tit; Brown Shrike; Azure-winged and Black-billed magpies; Daurian Jackdaw; Red-billed Chough; Rook; Carrion Crow; Common Raven; the lovely Long-tailed Rosefinch; Hawfinch; and Meadow, Black-faced and Yellow-breasted buntings. Possible migrants here could include Olive-backed Pipit; Eye-browed Thrush; Siberian Rubythroat; Dusky, Arctic and Pallas's leaf-warblers; Brown and Red-breasted flycatchers; Pallas's Reed-bunting and, if we are very lucky, Daurian Bunting. If time permits we may also visit the Ulaanbaatar sewerage ponds where at this time of the year almost anything can turn up!

(May 28) NIGHT: Hotel TBA, Ulaanbaatar

May 29, Day 4: Drive to Gun-Gulnuut nature Reserve. Ulaanbaatar is a relatively modern city situated in the north-central region of this enormous country. Before the turn of the century there were only a few permanent buildings here and as a consequence, there is little of historical interest for the visitor to see. Nevertheless, although this is a bird and natural history tour, we will take time to gain a sense of what the Mongolian capital is like and to visit one or two of its important sites of interest. Time permit, we can visit the Gandantegchinlen Khild, roughly translated to mean "the great place of complete joy." This is by far the largest, most impressive and most important monastery in the land and standing in its presence, one immediately realizes just how far removed we are from our native culture.

There are no suburbs in Mongolia, so on our drive east and once outside the city limits we can start scanning the steppe for Demoiselle Cranes! Though only 2 1/2 hours from the capital, the recently established Gun-Galuu Nature Reserve contains an extraordinarily beautiful river valley and mountain range surrounded by rolling steppe. Among the special natural attractions we will hope to find here are a small population of the endangered Argali, the world's largest bighorn sheep, and the extraordinarily graceful White-naped Crane, which is even rarer. There is also a chain of small lakes likely to hold an interesting variety of shorebirds and other waterbirds at this season.

Our comfortable ger camp overlooks the valley and the staff offers the usual Mongolian hospitality and hearty food.

NIGHT: Steppe Nomads Eco-resort/Ger Camp

May 30, Day 5: Drive Gun-Galnut to Hustain Nuuru National Park. We will spend a full morning exploring the wetlands, willow copses, and hillsides of Gun-Guluut Nature Reserve turning up the likes of Ruddy Shelduck and other anatids, Black-tailed Godwit and other waders, Mongolian and Common Black-headed Gulls, White-winged and other terns, Blue Hill Pigeon, Eurasian Cuckoo, up to three species of wheatears, Daurian Redstart, and with luck an assortment of migrant songbirds. Then we'll drive back westward and by late afternoon reach Hustain Nuuru National Park. This is a fabulous area of largely undisturbed steppe encompassing 50,000 hectares where the Takhi (Przewalski's Horse) has been successfully reintroduced. The reserve borders the Tuul River with all its attendant habitats in much better condition than around UB and also holds patches of birch and conifer forest. We plan to make our first exploration of the park this afternoon to spot our first horses and do some birding before returning to the research center and ger camp for a buffet dinner.

NIGHT: Ger Camp, Hustain Nuuru National Park

May 31, Day 6: Hustain Nuuru and return to Ulaanbaatar. This morning we will awake to the songs of Mongolian Larks and Richard's Pipits and after an early breakfast head out to make a full exploration of this beautiful steppe reserve. Because it is protected in the park, the amusing Siberian Marmot is abundant here and together with other prey attracts a wonderful variety of raptors such as Cinereous and Eurasian Griffon Vultures, Steppe, Golden, and (sometimes) Greater Spotted Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Saker Falcon (the huge Mongolian race is considered a separate species by some), Amur Falcon, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian and Lesser Kestrels, and of course the ubiquitous Black Kite. Black Storks nest in the gallery forest along the winding Tuul River and in rock clefts in the mountains. The river usually offers an assortment of waterbirds, and we will scour grasslands, dunes, cliffs, and scrublands for Daurian Partridge, Eurasian Hoopoe, Short-toed Lark, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Thick-billed Warbler, Brown Shrike, Rock Petronia, Hawfinch, Common and Long-tailed Rosefinches, and Meadow and Yellow-breasted Buntings. Great Bustard is not inconceivable.

After lunch we will have the opportunity to visit the park's excellent visitor center and hear more about the history of the Takhi reintroduction program. Then we will return to Ulaanbaatar stopping as birds and photo opportunities demand. This evening we will take in a short cultural performance and then sample another of the capital's best restaurants.

NIGHT: Hotel TBA, Ulaanbaatar

June 1, Day 7: Fly to Dalanzadgad and drive to Three Camels Lodge. Today we will take an early morning flight south for 1½ hours to Dalanzadgad where we will meet our crew and trusty vehicles that will be our companions for the next few days. From Dalanzadgad we will head 90 km westwards into South Gobi Province, the least populated region in all of Mongolia and the attractive Three Camels Lodge located at Bulagtai Hill near Bayanzag. Along the way we should as always be alert to anything of interest and possibilities include dapper Horned (or Shore) Larks; the lovely Oriental Plover - surely one of the most elegant members of its family; Greater Sand Plover in its smart breeding dress and hopefully the first of many Pallas's Sandgrouse. The lodge itself is a veritable oasis overlooking a vast grassy plain and some spectacular mountains. Most unusually for this area where trees are largely absent the lodge is partially sheltered by a windbreak of poplars which are often at this time of the year thronged with migrant passerines including: Siberian Rubythroat, Thick-billed Warbler, Asian Brown and Dark-sided Flycatchers. Rarities regularly turn up here, so we could potentially find almost anything. During the afternoon we will explore the area known as "Flaming Cliffs," an area made famous in 1923 by the first ever finds of fossilized dinosaur eggs in 1923. Roy Chapman Andrews (role model for Indiana Jones) was leading the Central Asiatic Expedition on behalf of the Natural History Museum of New York and this was just one of his many remarkable discoveries.

NIGHT: Three Camels Lodge

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June 2, Day 8: Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park was established in 1993 and expanded to its current size in 2000. The park, at nearly 27,000 square kilometers, is the largest national park in Mongolia. The park is named for the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains, which translates to the *Three Beauties*. The name is derived from three sub-ranges, the East, Middle and West Beauty, which form the eastern half of the park. The park lies on the northern edge of the Gobi desert.

After breakfast we'll head to Yolin Am, the Valley of the Lammergeier. Indeed the lofty ridges of this valley are regularly patrolled by Lammergeiers in addition to Himalayan Griffon, Black Vulture and Golden Eagle. We'll also search this rocky habitat for Wallcreeper; Crag Martin; Water Pipit; the endemic Kozlov's Accentor as well as the much commoner Brown and Alpine accentors; Black Redstart; White-winged Snowfinch; Great, Common and Beautiful rosefinches; and Godlewski's Bunting. We'll scan the higher slopes for Altai Snowcock and in doing so we may also see Ibex or Argali, the largest wild sheep in the world. There may be other eyes gazing on these creatures as well, for here we are in the territory of the snow leopard. Although visitors have seen them in the past, the chances of doing so are obviously very remote. All sorts of possibilities exist; Barred and Sulphur-bellied warblers may draw our attention, or maybe a small group of Twite drinking from the stream. In the oasis that is formed by our lodge and the poplars we will seek out any sheltering migrants: with a bit of luck we may encounter the likes of Eurasian Golden Oriole, Long-eared Owl, the *leucopsis* race of White Wagtail, Red-throated Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat, Taiga Flycatcher, Brown Shrike, Chaffinch and Pallas's Grasshopper, and Two-barred Greenish, Dusky and Thick-billed warblers.

NIGHT: Three Camels Lodge

June 3, Day 9: Drive to Khongoryn Els. After some more birding in the Gobi Altai we will head westwards into the main Gobi Desert, which lies to the south of the Gobi Altai. Our destination is Khongoryn Els, an immense, mountainous range of creamy-white sand dunes that early or late in the day look quite spectacular as the shadows pick out the curvaceous, wind-blown patterning. Here we will stay overnight at another ger lodge. Khongoryn Els also lies within the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park and is home to some of the world's largest sand dunes. The Gobi is a desert because the climate is so dry, rather than because of the temperature. In winter, temperatures are below freezing for months on end, but at the time of our visit, conditions should be very pleasant and the melt-water seeping down from the nearby Gobi Altai allows many wildflowers to thrive.

Further from the mountains, the conditions are more arid and sand dunes and stony or silty desert with low bushes take over from the dry steppe. Of particular interest here are the Saxaul woodlands, which have evolved to cope with the waterless conditions of the Gobi. This specialized habitat is home to a limited range of birds including McQueen's Bustard, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Desert Wheatear, Desert Lesser Whitethroat, Desert Warbler, Isabelline Shrike, the very localized Saxaul Sparrow which is confined exclusively to Saxaul woodland, and Henderson's Ground-Jay. We should also be alert to the presence of such delightful mammals as Goitered and Mongolian gazelles, both of which have adapted well to this harsh environment.

In addition to all this wonderful natural history we can expect to see Mongol horsemen riding across the steppe, attending the vast herds of horses, cattle, sheep, and especially domesticated Bactrian camels. The photographic opportunities, as they will assuredly be every day of this tour, will be seemingly end-less. In some years there is a small stream on the edge of the dunes, which acts as a great migrant trap as well as a drinking site for many Pallas's Sandgrouse and we may wish to spend time staking this site out. Later in the day we also may wish to climb the dunes to watch the setting sun, a simply unforgettable experience.

Tonight's ger camp provides much simpler accommodations than the Three Camel Lodge, but the gers are as comfortable as always, the staff is welcoming, the food is tasty and abundant – and the location is incomparable!

NIGHT: Gobi Adventure Ger Lodge

June 4-7, Days 10-13: Wilderness exploration. Since leaving the Three Camel Lodge, we have been accompanied by a highly experienced crew of tent pitchers, cooks, drivers, and other essential staff, who know the Gobi as only those of Mongol nomad stock can. They are ideal companions for the adventure that is about to begin. For the next 5 days we will simply travel through one of the last great wilderness areas on the planet, and one of the most sparsely populated. We will quite simply be in the middle of nowhere! What could be more exciting than to explore the steppe and wetlands of what seems to our untutored eyes a trackless 'waste'. Our remarkable crew will unerringly wend their way to the best birding spots as we seek out some of Mongolia's most special birds, mammals, reptiles and landscapes. During the next few days we will transect a range of subtly different habitats although much of our focus will be on finding those 'good' wetlands. Depending on prevailing water conditions we will visit sites such as the important wetland of Taatzing Tsaagan. Before we reach the lake, we'll spend time searching for the charismatic Henderson's Ground-Jay, aided by good local knowledge of its habitat requirements. The same areas are likely to hold both Isabelline and Steppe Gray shrikes, both species at the forefront of recent taxonomic decisions. Traveling into the heart of this extraordinary and fascinating region is a truly wonderful and uplifting experience. As we drive, we will follow roads and tracks where they exist, but in this vast country, we will often need to drive across open country to reach our destination. This is definitely a tour for those with an adventurous disposition!

Arriving at Taatzing Tsaagan Nuur, likely in the afternoon, we could be serenaded by displaying Richard's Pipits and "drumming" Common Snipe over our campsite, while flocks of Mongolian Trumpeter Finches feed nearby. Water levels in this lake vary considerably from year to year, governing to some extent what we'll see. If there is plenty of water, we could enjoy a selection perhaps with a few surprises in the form of different shorebird or wildfowl species. The damp areas left in drier years are home to Water Rail, Water Pipit and Citrine Wagtail as well as feeding Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, groups of White-winged Black Terns, perhaps some Garganey. In the nearby hills we will search for such species as Chukar, Saker Falcon, and Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush.

Other important sites we are likely to visit include Boon Tsagaan Nuur. Located to the north of the Gobi Altai Range, Boon Tsagaan Nuur is a large, brackish lake set like an azure gem amidst truly stunning scenery. Water is a precious commodity in the Gobi and large permanent bodies of water are few and far between but where these exist they can support a vast range of birds and other wildlife that would otherwise be absent from this arid country. This is a large salt lake and remains one of the most reliable sources of permanent water in the Gobi. It is here that we will search for one of Mongolia's most alluringly enigmatic birds, the striking Relict Gull—arguably the rarest of its kind. For many years it was known only from a single specimen collected over the Mongolian border in Chinese territory and often dismissed as just a hybrid. Only in the last twenty years has its true status as a rare and endangered relict species, restricted to a few breeding colonies in Central Asia, been established. Even today, only a comparatively small number of ornithologists have ever seen one in the field. This particular lake is a regular locality for this attractive species nevertheless in such an ephemeral environment nothing is guaranteed. We may well encounter Mongolian Gazelles and, if we are lucky, the shy Goitred Gazelle or even the rare Kulan or Mongolian Wild Ass.

Boon Tsagaan Nuur would be a wetland of major importance in its own right even without its famous gulls and at this season other waterbirds are often numerous. Species that occur here include Great Crested Grebe; Eurasian Spoonbill; Whooper and Mute swans; Greylag, Bar-headed and elegant Swan geese; Falcated and Ferruginous ducks; Pallas's Fish-Eagle; Eastern Marsh-Harrier; Common Crane; Pied Avocet; Yellow-legged, Brown-headed and Great Black-headed gulls; and Little and White-winged terns. Few landbirds breed in this inhospitable region, however, the reedbeds which fringe parts of the lake are the only cover for miles around and are home to such species as: Pallas's Grasshopper and Paddyfield warblers, Bearded Reedling (actually a Parrotbill!) and Pallas's Reed-Bunting. Away from the water's edge, we will search for true desert species including Isabelline Shrike, Desert Wheatear, Desert Warbler and Mongolian Trumpeter Finch. The lake also acts like a magnet for migrating passerines as they fly over the immense Gobi and we can expect to encounter almost any migrant that may cross this vast empty "wasteland." Species we may encounter include Gray's Grasshopper and Thick-billed or Greenish warblers. In addition a variety of rarities such as Chinese Pond-Heron have been seen here in the past, and the list of shorebirds could include Greater and Lesser sand-plovers; Gray-

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tailed Tattler; Asiatic Dowitcher; Broad-billed Sandpiper; Little, Temminck's, Red-necked and Long-toed stilts; and Terek Sandpiper. Again! Almost anything is possible.

NIGHTS: Mobile Tented Camp

June 8, Day 14: Boon Tsaagan Nuur to Bayanhongor. Depending on our flight schedule, we will either break camp at the lake this afternoon and head for Bayanhongor where we will pitch our tents for the last time (perhaps overlooking an idyllic grassy valley at the base of the Hangai Mountains) or spend a final morning exploring Boon Tsaagan Nuur before heading directly to the Bayanhongor airport.

NIGHT: Mobile Tented Camp

June 9, Day 15: Bayanhongor to Ulaanbaatar. Today our flight returns us to Ulaanbaatar where the luxuries of a hot shower, a fine farewell dinner, and a soft bed await.

NIGHT: Hotel TBA, Ulaanbaatar

June 10, Day 16: Main Tour ends and Lake Hovsgol Extension begins. For those not joining the extension to Lake Hovsgol, you will be escorted by Nomadic Expeditions staff to Chinggis Khaan International Airport to catch your flights back home. The Extension group will fly North today to Murun.

LAKE HOVSGOL EXTENSION

June 10, Day 16: Ulaanbaatar to Murun. This morning you can sleep in, get to know Ulaanbaatar better, or go shopping for cashmere at one of the city's excellent outlets. In the afternoon, we will catch our 1½ hour flight to Murun, the capital of Hovsgol Aimag. The city, mainly a large settlement of gers, lies in a lovely river valley surrounded by steppe and mountains. The hotel where we'll spend the night sits on the river bank and the birding from the "back yard" can be quite rewarding.

NIGHT: Hotel TBA, Murun

June 11, Day 17: Murun to Lake Hovsgol. After an early breakfast we board our trusty Russian vehicles and make our way northward to Lake Hovsgol. The road is far from smooth but takes us through classic "mountain steppe" – great expanses of grassland dotted with small ger camps and hillsides forested only on the moister north-facing slopes. An hour or so along the way we will stop at Lake Irkil, a soda lake that typically teems with waterfowl including specialties such as Whooper Swan and Swan Goose as well as large rafts of Velvet Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Common Pochard, and Tufted Duck; and sometimes a nice assortment of shorebirds. We may also take time to investigate a nearby site of Bronze Age "deer stones," which retain much of their mystery. Demoiselle Cranes are common along our route and we will stop in several places with broad vistas to scan for Great Bustard. At this season the steppe can be carpeted in swaths of yellow cinquefoil, pink primrose, and purple pasqueflowers. Leaving the steppe, we will enter the southern-most edge of the great Siberian taiga, here composed mainly of mature larch forest. Topping a rise, we'll get a first glimpse of the lake, Mongolia's Dark Blue Pearl, stretched out below us. The rest of the journey is along the lakeshore, and our home for the next few days is a comfortable ger camp at the tip of a peninsula with our own birding pond on site.

NIGHT: Toilogt Ger Camp

June 12-14, Days 18-20: Lake Hovsgol. The lake is at an elevation of 5265 feet above sea level and is 85 miles long and over 800 feet deep. It is the second-most voluminous freshwater lake in Asia, and holds almost 70% of Mongolia's fresh water and 0.4% of all the fresh water in the world and is the centerpiece of a national park that is larger than Yellowstone.

Birders could do worse than spend an entire 3-day stay within walking distance of our ger camp. The magnificent lake lies immediately to the east with its Pacific Loons, Little Ringed Plovers nesting on the shingle beach, and nesting White-tailed Eagles. Immediately adjacent is a shallow lagoon with dozens of pairs of Horned Grebes, a few pairs of Bar-headed Geese, and up to 15 other species of waterfowl while the grassy areas host hoopoes and up to three species of wagtails. Above the pond, alpine peaks – quite possibly still snow covered at this date – fill the western horizon. And surrounding us is endless conifer forest, home to Pallas's and Arctic Warblers, other warblers, Red-throated Thrushes, Bramblings, and several species of woodpeckers, among many other boreal species.

Tempting as this passive scenario may be, we will explore the lake shore and nearby mountains and forests thoroughly during our 3-day sojourn by 4-wheel-drive jeep, on foot, and possibly on horseback, sampling various habitats, hoping to glimpse some of the less common residents such as Black-billed Capercaillie and perhaps having the good fortune to hit a “fall out” of migrants along the lakeshore, which can be quite impressive. In addition to birds, the wetlands and forest wildflowers here can be stunning in their variety and abundance. We will also have the opportunity to visit with local nomads in their gers.

Some of the bird species that we have a good chance of finding at Lake Hovsgol, in addition to those already mentioned, include: Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes, Booted Eagle, Long-toed Stint, White-winged Tern, Blue Hill Pigeon, Rufous Turtle Dove, Common and Oriental Cuckoos, Eurasian Wryneck, Grey-headed Woodpecker (five other species occur more rarely), Citrine Wagtail, Olive-backed and Tree Pipits, Eurasian Nutcracker, Siberian Rubythroat, Eurasian and Eversmann's Redstarts, Dusky, Yellow-browed, and Two-barred Greenish Warblers, Taiga and Sooty Flycatchers, Long-tailed and Willow Tits, Eurasian Siskin, Common Crossbill, and Pine, Ortolan and Little Buntings.

The Park is home to a variety of wildlife including Ibex, Argali, Elk, Wolf, Wolverine, Musk Deer, Brown Bear, Siberian Moose and Sable. It is also a wonderful site for birding and being this far north and in a quite different set of habitats than we will have encountered elsewhere in Mongolia should produce a suite of exciting and different birds.

NIGHTS: Toilogt Ger Camp

June 15, Day 21: Fly Hatgal to Ulaanbaatar. Today we will sadly take our leave of this beautiful place and fly back to UB from the nearby airstrip in Hatgal (if flights are available; if not, we will drive back). This evening we will sample yet another of Ulaanbaatar's excellent restaurants.

NIGHT: Hotel TBA, Ulaanbaator

June 16, Day 22: Depart Ulaanbaatar. Transfer will be provided to Chinggis Khaan International Airport (ULN) to begin the journey home.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate if we receive your request with enough advance time.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants will be required to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Bishop and a Chris Leahy for the main tour; Chris Leahy for the extension.

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David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 35 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, and most recently Central Asia. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England), a koala or two, and a mob of kangaroos on a lovely wooded property on the outskirts of the university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia. David is an avid photographer and his images can increasingly be seen in the pages of wildlife publications.

Christopher W. Leahy currently holds the Gerard A. Bertrand Chair of Natural History and Field Ornithology at the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He has been a professional conservationist for more than thirty-five years and co-founded Mass Audubon's Center for Biological Conservation. His comprehensive interest in natural history began in childhood, and he is a recognized authority on birds and insects. His published works include *The Birdwatcher's Companion to North American Birdlife* (Princeton University Press, 2nd edition, 2004), *The First Guide to Insects* in the Peterson series (Houghton-Mifflin), *Introduction to New England Birds* (Mass Audubon), and *The Nature of Massachusetts* (Addison-Wesley), and he is the editor of a series of authoritative volumes on the natural history of New England. Chris was instrumental in the creation of one of the world's first natural history travel programs at Mass Audubon in the early 1970s and has designed and led natural history explorations to more than 70 countries on all of the continents. He is especially fascinated with the world's great remaining wilderness areas and biodiversity hot spots, especially those with rich indigenous cultures such as Mongolia, Bhutan, Gabon, and Madagascar. He first visited Mongolia in 1982 and has been making almost annual visits since 1994, creating itineraries to parts of the country previously little visited by foreigners. Chris's first career was as a professional actor, beginning when he was 10 years old. In his twenties he worked on stage, in film, and on television in New York City performing in such well-known venues as the Public Theater, The New York Shakespeare Festival, Café LaMama, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. He grew up in the seaside town of Marblehead, Massachusetts and has lived in nearby Gloucester with his family since the 1970s.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the main tour is tour is **\$8295** in double occupancy from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia which includes all meals from Dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 14. The fee for the Lake Hovsgol extension is **\$2995** in double occupancy from Ulaanbaatar and includes meals from lunch on Day 14 through breakfast on Day 20. All fees include accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, internal flights (economy class), park entrance fees, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. It does not include airfare from your home to Ulaanbaatar and return, airport departure taxes, visa fees, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement fee for the main tour is **\$700**; and the single supplement for the extension is **\$325**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodation, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Our prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for the main tour is **\$500** per person plus an additional **\$500** deposit for the extension. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposits are transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person per deposit. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposits are transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person per deposit.

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip is required for this tour. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through *Travel Insured International*, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **All requests for travel assistance (air tickets, additional hotels, etc.) must be received no later than 90 days prior to departure date. Within 90 days, reservations cannot be guaranteed.**

BAGGAGE: Clients are encouraged to take whatever they think they will reasonably need for this tour, including telescope and tripod (especially useful), camera and video equipment. With regard to clothing, participants should bring sufficient items with them so that when we depart Ulaanbaatar you will only need to have minimal laundry done. Getting laundry dry in camp can sometimes be difficult. While participants may be permitted two pieces of baggage into and out of the USA, Mongolian airlines limits are variable and will have to be negotiated on the spot. We strongly recommend that you carry your baggage in soft bags so that when camping, your checked bag can be kept on the luggage truck with all the things you do not immediately need and use your carry-on for your immediate needs. This will permit more room in your ger or tent and more personal comfort. Ideally everything should be packed in plastic bags to protect items from sand and rain.

ACCOMMODATION: Mongolia is not a regular tourist destination. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is minimal especially once we depart the capital Ulaanbaatar. In Ulaanbaatar, we will stay in an attractive, modern hotel. Needless to say, the very best birding sites are a long way from the nearest “hotel” so our local agents will set up very comfortable camps, and we will stay at the attractive Three Camels Lodge.

While camping, VENT has opted for the more comfortable walk-in tents with cots etc. However, in the event of strong winds, we will have to revert to crawl-in pup-tents. We will also stay in Ger Camps. Gers are the traditional large round felt tents of the region, and the camps are almost like tented motels and are spacious and cozy, often heated by wood or dung fires. All camping and ger locations will be at delightful sites located amidst lake, steppe, desert, forest and mountain scenery. Washing and toilet facilities at these camps are basic and consist of a separate toilet (happily though, they are generally clean and western style facilities) and a building with hot showers (this can be idiosyncratic). Each camp also has its own restaurant where soft drinks and beer are usually available. You should bring swimming trunks or a bathing suit to wear when showering.

ALTITUDE: Mongolia has an average elevation of 1,580m (5,200 feet) with its highest mountains rising to over 4,300m (14,000 feet). We will likely not be ascending much over 2,300m (7,500 feet) and with the exception of two optional hikes in the Gobi Altai to look for Snowcock. Most if not all the walking will be on fairly flat, albeit sometimes sandy, dusty or rough, stony terrain. We will rarely be walking along paved roads in Mongolia. However, we will walk at a slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

CLIMATE: Mongolia exhibits a continental weather system that typically can be very mixed at this time of year, so you need to dress accordingly. Generally it will be warm and very dry (almost no humidity) during the day; occasionally we will encounter hot conditions with very bright sunshine, which characteristically in the mountains and at these generally higher elevations results in increased radiation and thus the skin burns more readily than one supposes. It can be cold at night and in the early mornings and at a few of the higher altitude sites. Rain is also possible at almost any time and we may encounter some snow. At night temperatures can drop below freezing. Temperatures may range from 25° to 100°F.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day; however, short pants, short skirts, and halter-tops are not appropriate in this rather conservative region. Participants may want to pack one set of slightly smarter clothes

to wear at our hotel in Ulaanbaatar. Hard-wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. Sturdy hiking boots with a solid lug sole are essential; sneakers or sports-type shoes are not appropriate, as the ground will be rough, sandy and occasionally wet and possibly slippery a lot of the time in Mongolia. Some flip-flops or shower shoes are recommended. Participants should bring layers rather than one or two large items. Sturdy, rainproof jackets and pants are strongly recommended (shower proof plastic jackets are not sufficient), in addition to at least one warm sweater, and a down jacket or down vest. Other items that are recommended include a warm head-covering such as a beret or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, gloves and scarf. Silk or synthetic thermal long underwear will be very handy for the cool nights and early mornings. Sunglasses are very essential (bring a spare pair). Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important. It is also useful if the socks are long enough so that the bottom of one's pants can be tucked inside.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please absolutely no bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very special, elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leaders to hear those critical, but so easily overlooked, subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

CURRENCY: Credit cards are increasingly accepted at hotels and shops; however, you will most certainly need cash once we are "on the road." Participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express U.S. dollar travelers checks and/or U.S. dollars in cash. The latter can be very useful in an emergency. The Mongolian currency is the *Togrog*.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter Mongolia. No visa is required for US citizens visiting for fewer than 90 days. For other nationalities, a 30 day visa can be obtained from your nearest embassy. Travelers arriving or departing Mongolia through Beijing, China should be aware of Chinese visa regulations. Be advised that American citizens are required to have a visa even if only to transit through China. For more information on these requirements see the Consular Information Sheets for these countries at the Bureau of Consular Affairs web page: <http://travel.state.gov/>.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good repair (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying a Swarovski spotting scope; however, you are strongly recommended to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish, as this will greatly enhance your enjoyment of this tour, especially if you are used to carrying and regularly using your own scope. You should bring all the camera equipment, spare flash-cards, batteries, and film that you will need. Flash-cards and film will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Ulaanbaatar. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little film or flash-card space, and this can cause some distress. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough!!!!).** UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem.

Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. A really good flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp is ideal. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each. A small daypack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas where we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver and his mate. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

- **Flashlights or headlamps** (as previously indicated): We will be out at night on a few occasions; a small flashlight or headlamp is essential to find your way in your tent and around camp at night, especially at checklist sessions.

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- **Handy-wipes:** These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour. Although basic shower facilities will be available in camp, some participants found the use of Handy-wipes was sufficient for some nights.
- **Spare glasses or contact lenses.**
- **One bath towel and face cloth:** Our ground agents will provide a brand new towel for all participants. However, a second one of your own, plus your own face cloth, is handy.
- **Sunscreen:** Strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater; lip balm is also essential.
- **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – Mongolia uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. The sockets are designed to accommodate two round prongs in the Russian/European style. Do not rely on an electric razor, or having electricity available for charging your video batteries especially while at camps.

Language – Mongolian is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Kazakh, Uzbek and Korean. The traditional Mongolian script looks like Arabic turned 45 degrees. In more recent times the Russian Cyrillic alphabet was adopted with two additional characters. Mongolian also has a Romanised form, although the 35 Cyrillic characters give a better representation of Mongolian sounds.

Time – Ulaanbaatar is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time; noon in Ulaanbaatar is 8:00 p.m. (previous day) in Los Angeles and 11:00 p.m. (previous day) in New York; 4:00 a.m. in London and 2:00 p.m. in Sydney.

Snacks - It is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks, as western-style snacks will not be readily available and Mongolian food may not include the roughage and variety we have grown accustomed to in our Western diets.

Bug juice – Everyone will need **plenty of insect repellent** to deal with the mosquitoes and biting flies we will occasionally encounter at the time of our visit.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. **Malaria is NOT present.** As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B. No vaccinations are required; however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days from an infected area. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

Medical facilities in Mongolia are very limited and do not meet most Western standards, especially for emergency health care requirements. Ulaanbaatar, the capital, has the majority of medical facilities; outside of Ulaanbaatar medical facilities and treatment are extremely limited or non-existent. Specialized emergency care for infants and the elderly is not available. Infectious diseases, such as plague, meningococcal meningitis, and tuberculosis, are present at various times of the year. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost thousands of dollars. Therefore, VENT requires all tour participants to purchase a Medical Evacuation insurance policy.

PLEASE NOTE: While away from Ulaanbaatar, participants will be at least two days from western medical facilities in case of emergency. Please be aware of this before joining the tour. Furthermore, western doctors are few and far between, even in Ulaanbaatar.

Participants are advised NOT to drink tap water or unboiled water placed at the table unless advised by your tour leader. Bottled drinks (including uncarbonated bottled mineral water) will be available at all times. You should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables, or food that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open, permitting flies to settle. Unpeeled fruit is fine, provided you wash the exterior first in clean water.

Biting insects can be very common locally, especially around the lakes. Insect repellent (preferably with a high percentage of diethyltoluamide – DEET) should provide adequate protection. We also recommend *CUTTER'S LOTION* in the squeeze bottle or pump-style *OFF*. We will experience strong sun in several places so a good sun-screen and lip balm is recommended.

TRAVEL: In order to reach the various habitats and birds of this vast country, there will be a fair amount of driving. After driving on poorly paved roads around the capital, we are unlikely to travel on anything other than dirt roads and sometimes bumpy and dusty desert tracks. At other times we will traverse dried up (in some cases not so dry) riverbeds, where many large boulders make the journey uncomfortable. We'll be using vehicles admirably suited to the purpose and making frequent stops, but some discomfort is inevitable. Because of this, breakdowns, flat tires and getting stuck in sand happen frequently. 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. There will be the occasional strenuous uphill walk such as when searching for the likes of Altai Snowcock. Elsewhere, we'll be wandering around fairly flat open landscapes at altitudes often around 6,500 feet, making plenty of stops for birds. On most days our ground crew will first help the cook set up, then erect common shelters before erecting the group's tents while we go birding nearby; however, in 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. Most days will consist of an optional walk before breakfast; early mornings are not compulsory.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend *Andrew Isles: Natural History Books* for the Asia-Pacific region, <http://www.andrewisles.com/>. They may also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.

Birds:

Gombobaatar, S., A. Graulich and Sh. Bolbaatar. *Birds of Mongolia*. Helm Field Guides. Due out March 2012.
This will be THE bird field guide to have along on tour.

Wildlife:

Benton, M. J. *et al* (editors). *The Age of Dinosaurs in Russia and Mongolia*. 2003. Cambridge University Press.
Finch, C. *Mongolia's Wild Heritage*. 1999. Mongolian Ministry of Nature & Environment.
Mallon, D. P. *The mammals of the Mongolian People's Republic*. *Mammal Rev.* 15(2):71-102.
Smith, A. T. and Xie, Y. (Eds) *A guide to the Mammals of China*. 2008. Princeton. This is the only guide to all the mammals of China and includes many species we are likely to encounter in Mongolia.

Plants:

Hilbig, W. *The Vegetation of Mongolia*. Amsterdam, SPB Academic Publishing.
Polunin, O. and Stainton, A. *Flowers of the Himalaya*. 1984. Delhi: Oxford University Press. A very helpful guide; while not quite encompassing Mongolia, it will help somewhat with the flowering plants we encounter.

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General:

- Becker, J. *The Lost Country: Mongolia Revealed*. 1993. Insightful and well written. Blunden, J. *Bradt Travel Guide: Mongolia*. 2003. Bradt Travel Guides.
- Bowde, C. *The Jebtsundampa Khutukhtus of Urga*. A renowned Buddhist history of the greatest Mongolian lamas.
- Kahn, P. *The Secret History of the Mongols: the Origins of Genghis Khan*. Regarded as the best study of *The Secret History*.
- Kohn, M. 2008. *Mongolia*. Lonely Planet Guides. Footscray, Victoria, Australia. Severin, T. *In Search of Genghis Khan*. 1991. Great photos; an excellent review of nomadic lifestyles.
- The Secret History of the Mongols*, Mongolia's most famous book, has no known author. This epic history records the life and deeds of Genghis Khan.

Maps: Maps produced outside Mongolia are according to the Lonely Planet Guide “routinely inaccurate and best avoided.” Good maps and a road atlas are available in Ulaanbaatar and we will make a point of setting time aside to visit the map shop on our first full day in country.

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history. 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K. <http://www.nhbs.com/>; Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280.

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

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect December 13, 2011 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.