

CHECK-IN



SLEEP IN A GER

Mongolian nomads have lived in portable, round tents called gers – known as yurts in neighbouring countries – since long before Genghis Khan's marauding armies swept across Asia. Even now, you'll find them pitched around the fringes of most established settlements, including the capital, Ulaanbaatar. Tourist ger camps are found right across the country, though it would be wise not to mistake them for glamping-style accommodation. But they are usually cosy, built around wood or dung-fired stoves, with low doorways and roofs designed to trap warmth, and multiple insulating layers. Decorative flourishes may include hand-carved and painted support beams and woven floor rugs. See intrepidtravel.com



RIDE A CAMEL

Walking through desert sand dunes can be very hard work. Far easier, and much more fun, is to ride a camel across the dunes. A rocky, noisy and smelly jaunt on a twin-humped Bactrian camel through a spectacular dune network known as the Mongols Els is one of the best experiences you can have in Mongolia. After crossing the dunes, you'll arrive at the banks of Lake Ereen, a marshy oasis that serves as a wetlands breeding centre for wild ducks, geese, pelicans, grebes and cormorants. See mongolia-guide.com



VISIT A NOMAD

About 10 per cent of Mongolia's 3 million people are nomadic and retain links to their itinerant, ancestral lifestyles in one way or another. Mongolian nomads typically herd a combination of goats, sheep, cattle, horses and camels. It's a sparsely populated country, but wherever you go you'll always find nomadic herders whose cultural upbringing obliges them to welcome strangers arriving at their ger. Without question, you'll be invited inside to share salted goat's milk tea and dried curd, perhaps accompanied by mutton dumplings. See mongolia.travel

SIX OF THE BEST

MONGOLIAN MOMENTS

BY MARK DAFFEY

Mark Daffey travelled as a guest of Intrepid Travel. See intrepidtravel.com



WATCH AN EAGLE HUNT

For centuries, the semi-nomadic Kazakhs populating Mongolia's westernmost province of Bayan-Ulgii have trained golden eagles to hunt red foxes and marmots to make warm, furry headgear. Hunting traditionally takes place during winter, though several festivals that have raised the eagle hunters' profile internationally are held during spring and autumn, purely for tourism purposes. They nevertheless showcase exceptional falconry skills and horsemanship. It's also possible to see the eagle hunters in action outside festival times. See mongolia.travel



SWIM IN A LAKE

Mongolians will tell you that when it comes to swimming, they make great divers, that is, they sink, which is hardly surprising when you learn that Mongolia is the world's second largest landlocked country. But if you want a dip visit Durgun Lake in western Mongolia, wedged between the Bumbaat Mountain and the Mongols Els sand dunes inside the Khar Us Nuur National Park in Gobi-Altai Province. Assuming you've timed your visit outside the long Mongolian winters, a refreshing plunge here may be your best chance to wet your toes. See mongolia-guide.com



LISTEN TO A THROAT SINGER

After decades of neglect during the Soviet era, the Mongolian art of throat singing has undergone a renaissance. One man at least partly responsible for that is Dashdorj Tserendavaa – one of just three living throat singing "masters", who gives lessons in his hometown of Chandmani where the practice is believed to have originated. If you're lucky enough to catch a performance, you'll be transfixed as these nomadic maestros bend their vocal cords to mimic the sounds of the mountains, rivers and streams. In Ulaanbaatar, the Tumen Ekh National Song and Dance Ensemble cultural show includes throat singing and folk dancing. See tumenekh.wordpress.com