

Winter in the land of tsaatan...

Winter Time in Tsaatan Land

Incursion into the Tsaatan land.

The Tsaatans or Dukhas, best known in Mongolia under the name of Uriankhai. More than an ethnic group, whose origins are mixed with the history of Mongolia and other tribes from Central Asia.

The Dukhas are part of the great family of Tuvans.

The Tuvans was the dominant people around the 6th and 7th century, present not only on the current territory of Mongolia, but also in China, Russia and further west.

The Dukhas are descendants of a proud people that has spread far North, East and North-West, their culture and their ancestors mix together with the Samoyeds, the Evens, the Evenkis and the Nenets.

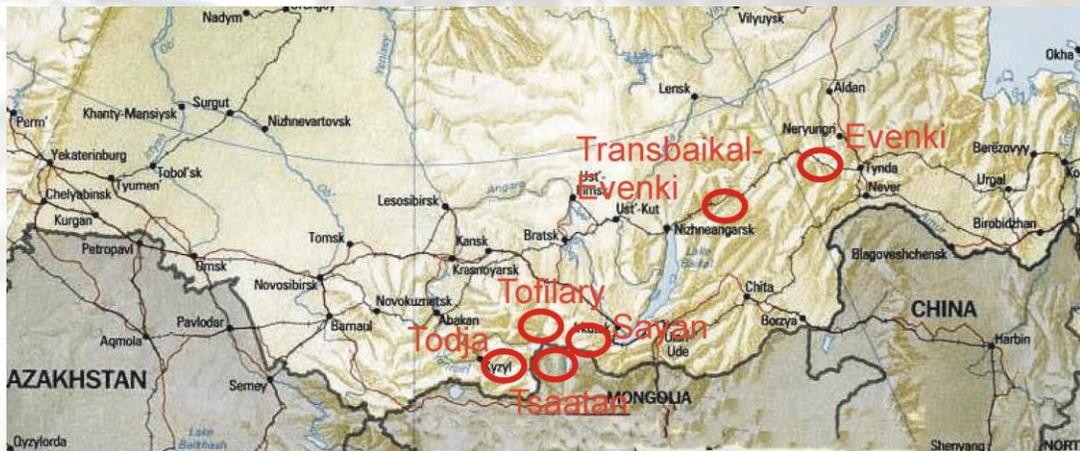
The Mongolian Dukhas are commonly called Tsaatans, meaning "who lives with the reindeer" or "reindeer breeders", Tsaa is the Mongolian name ... or Uyghur to describe a reindeer.

The Tsaatans live in the far North of the country, above the depression of Darkhad in the taiga. At one time, before Soviet domination, the Tsaatan people from the Northern taiga of Mongolia lived throughout the area including Darkhad depression, taiga in the North and West, the mountains of Khoridol Saridag in the East, to the door of the big pass that separates the taiga zone, from the lower part which goes down to Moron.

At that time they lived freely without borders, nomad in Mongolia and Russia, forming a community with other tribes like Tuvan, Tofilarys, Todjas and Sayan Mountains, which are now living in the Russian territory... on the other side of the border...



Tsaatan people are freedom-loving and certainly proud of ethnicity that suffered a lot from Soviet control, kolkhozes and purges
Currently living in the Northern and Western taiga of Mongolia, to the North of the Aimag of Khuvsgul, on the borders of Mongolia and Russia, some 50 families, divided into two main groups.
Far from the image of a "gentle savage", endangered and living in poverty often described as "miserable", the Tsaatans certainly lead a rough life, but truly close to their origins, their culture, true to their "taiga" and in perpetual search of better grazing areas so that that is so necessary to the reindeer and their nourishment, searching for the freshest and coldest corners, for their reindeer to grow in best conditions.



After a very critical period, the herd of reindeer is regaining some strength, with a 10000th new-born celebrated two years ago.
The Tsaatan people are on the right track and will continue haunting for many years in the Mongolian taiga.
The Tsaatan people mainly live from hunting, gathering plants and use a very large part of their reindeer milk, which is incredibly rich with fat and vitamins.
The reindeer is the heart of Tsaatan culture, it offers milk, some meat in small quantities, their horns that fall down every year also give a significant income for families.



At this time, many families have TV set, solar panels and even a radio to communicate between members of the clan All of this is combined with the Spartan look of tipis ... Some families also have a few cattle, sheep, cows and of course, horses, who usually stay lower in the valley.

In the taiga, the horse is not the best mean of transport and the reindeer is actually the most suitable animal, but since the families must get to Tsagaanuur to get children to school, to make a few purchases or to sell some handicrafts or reindeer horns, the horse is much faster and does not suffer from the heat at the low altitude.



A trip, an excursion, an initiation it is hard to put in words this unique experience at the heart of the red Taiga.

An entrance on tiptoes in Tsaatan territory, trying to discover this world, where the man and the nature almost takes a step forward towards human ... a world only Tsaatans live, in perfect harmony with all of the "elements".



Your trip :

A trip in the Tsaatan territory...

The Tsaatans wander all through the year, depending on the temperatures ... not looking for the hottest places or the places that are better sheltered from the wind ... they move along with their reindeer herds.

The reindeer can graze almost everywhere, though it is essential to reindeer to eat lichen.

The lichen can be found only in the areas of taiga, Tsaatans are thus obliged to remain permanently near areas where lichens can be found – it is in Taiga which usually is a cold place.

Another must for Tsaatans is to find places with as few mosquitoes as possible in the summer time, because the reindeer are particularly sensitive to insect bites.

So this is why either in summer or winter, families live in the coldest places of Northern Mongolia.

Summer or winter, Tsaatans live under the same tipi throughout all of the seasons, equipped with a few beds on the floor, just a few logs of wood replacing box spring, reindeer skins and a small stove which seems ridiculous for rigors of the Siberian winter.

They live well, as if the weather had no direct effect on them, like the time did not exist.

Your journey is a journey out of time, a journey for the motivated and "warned" ones, you will live like a Tsaatan, sleep under a tipi and ride on a reindeer.



"Your journey is an immersion in this amazing world of Tsaatans, without any trick, one of the most authentic travels designed specially for you.

A trip during which you must learn to forget the comfort zone you are used to as well as the logic of things, a journey where he is quite hard to forget all the tales and stories about the people Tsaatan.

But it is also a unique journey that no one will be able to forget.

It should be mentioned, that the program can be modified depending on weather and snow conditions.

Day 1. Reception at the airport

Visit of the grand monastery of Gandan. In Ulan Bator there are 7 principal monasteries and several temples and palaces, from which the most visited are Gandan and the Bogdo Khaan, or the winter palace whose construction began in 1890.



Ulan Bator is built on the banks of the Tuul River, previously called Uрга, in honor of the son of a Mongolian nobleman. The name of Ulan Bator was given to the capital of Mongolia, during the revolution of 1921. The name of *Ulaan baatar (the red hero)* was given to the capital at the time of the proclamation of peoples's republic of Mongolia. The streets of the capital are more bustling in the summer time than in winter but there reigns a constant agitation, including late at night. The city is divided in several districts which present large diversities and there are even yurts in the very centre of the city. The development of Ulan Bator is surprising and you will find there all the conveniences of a modern city...

In winter there are few opportunities for visits except for a few monasteries, but a passage through the great market of the city is quite authentic - everything is selling there, it is like the small peace of the past.



Day 2. Departure by plane to Mörön and Khatgal.

In the afternoon a local flight to Moron.

Reception at the airport and transfer by a vehicle to Khatgal.

Just over 100 km of a track road to get to Khatgal, a small town next to a lake, former Russian colony once very prosperous from the trade between Mongolia and Russia.

100 km with a taste of beginning of an adventure ...

Arrival in Khatgal in late afternoon and installation in a yurt at a guest house.



Khatgal is a peaceful hamlet, old town and a very important transit port for goods from Russia.

Khatgal is located at the southern part of Lake Khuvsgul.

A long day on a track, in beautiful landscapes, between the worlds of plants and minerals.

Day 3. Departure to Tsagaanuur - stop in Ulaan Uul.

Long day on track, in beautiful landscapes, between the worlds of plants and minerals.

4 hours of crossings of mountain passes and valleys, before reaching Tomiin BRIGAD, a tiny hamlet built around the only bridge that allows to cross the Beltes river.

You have another two hours before reaching Ulaan Uul, literally the "red mountain".

But first he must comply some administrative forms of border crossing - the checkpoint of the border is a few kilometres from the village.

Ulaan Uul is almost like a ghost town, you can perceive some activity there, but there are very few people in the aisles that separate the different neighbourhoods.

It is a little bit further, 6 kilometres from the village, after crossing the river ... which usually an impressive moment that you will reach the camp of Oyuna who lives there, close to his children, at the bottom of a green valley and protected from the icy winter winds.

Housing in a nomadic yurt.



View over Khoridol Saridag from the camp Oyuna Biluu-Bag.

Day 4. Transfer to Tsaagan Nuur . Ulaan uul/Tsagaanuur

Ulaan uul marks the beginning of the Depression of Darkhad, this area is traversed by several small streams and rivers, which disappear in the steppe or form multiple lakes and lagoons..... in winter, this green valley turns into a desert.

Installation in the guest house of Lagva with stunning views of the Lake Tsagaanuur ... the White Lake.

In winter it is always white and covered with a small shell of ice.

Another world begins here.... The world of "the depths of Mongolia."

Lagva guesthouse



Lagva guest-house

The beginning of an adventure in the Tsaatan land.

Day5. Departure on a horseback towards «the end of the world»....

The first part in a wide valley, to get used to the seat and adjust to the jerky trot of the Mongolian horses.

At the bottom of the valley there is located Nariin Ovur, literally "the narrow valley" and you will be there at the foot of the taiga.

This area is used as a winter camp of many families Tsaatan, family Zorigo will set up their winter camp there but who can predict what the Tsaatans do?

...



The Zorigo camp will be there, because his youngest children go to school in Tsagaanuur.

Welcoming from Tsaatan people in tpee of family, traditional and ceremonial actions during which you will be served a bowl of reindeer milk for your welcome.

Then installation in your tpee.

There are two main groups of Tsaatans of Mongolia one of them is in the West of Tsaaganuur, is the group that family Zorigo belong to, the other group lives further up North.



In Mongolian they would say Zuun taiga and Baruun Taiga, the right and the lefttaiga... but paradoxically, here the right side is on the West... Each group remains relatively independent and maintain separate territories. In each group there are between 15 and 25 families, each family having between 50 and 100 reindeer, which are all used for the shoe making or for breeding, the herd is located near the camp and those most wild ones are hobbled not to wander too far away.



Nariin Ovuur
Overnight stay under a tpee.

Day 6. Discovery of the life Tsaatan people.

Living under a tipi could remind you of some old childhood dreams ... a dream come true. Light the fire in the little stove to reach a temperature that better suited to "Tsaatan neophyte" coming out of ones sleeping bag can sometimes be a very delicate gesture and certainly not a harmless one



The family is already up and go to do their daily tasks, outside temperature seems to have no impact on Tsaatans because it's a part of their lives. Collect some firewood, take care of the reindeer, drink some tea, meet neighbour, here life goes on without a single grain of stress, which can sometimes confuse a Western visitor. Zorigo will be there to introduce you, help you discover his world, his life, his everyday freedom.

Day 7. Waking up under a tipi....

You will understand that the most important thing to do in the morning is to light a fire to thaw the water that will be later used to prepare your tea or coffee.

A reflex that assimilates quickly, put the mittens and cap before anything else. In these cold conditions, all actions useless will be soon swept away under the ensuring eye of Zorigo, so you'll soon adapt.

A morning relaxation to soak up the nature and the rhythm of life of Tsaatans.



Here, nothing is really planned, the Tsaatans will not come seeking for you, but your guide / translator will be there to initiate things, you need to know to be both discreet and available and appreciate life, whatever are the conditions. You'll probably enjoy your first ride on the back of a reindeer – first a short one to get started.



Shavnagin Khundii

Amazing animal that looks like a large goat, with quick and fast movements.... in practice, riding the reindeer is easier than one might imagine ... except it's fairly easy to balance.... The reindeer stands incredibly safely on his feet and can go over rocks, peat swamps, streams and even river in not an obstacle for this animal who has adapted perfectly to the taiga.



A loop to visit another family, located a little further into the valley and back to the Zorigo camp.

Days 8 & 9 ... What to say about those two days

.... Who knows what life will be like at that time, who can say now what would the Tsaatans and your host Zorigo will do during the week

Tsaatan life being made in a way where it is impossible to give a certain plan to it..... to even try to announce a program for those few days, would be an insult, disrespect to our friends - the Tsaatan people.

A voyage in the "upside" Taiga as called by Tsaatans, beautiful place where a small group of three or four families live together with a hundred of reindeer.....



Photo of the early twentieth century



Photo actual

... Or a day at the camp, dedicated to learn about the culture or simply see this culture dedicated to reindeer, a calm rhythm where everyone has his own place, his own role and habits.

The "visitor" must learn to respect the somewhat wild and free spirit of Tsaatans, allow yourself to be guided, enjoy their fair values and the special moments.



Day 10. Returning back to the real world

Certainly with some regret, you will leave this haven of freedom and the few hours on a back of a horse will seem very short, before arriving at Tsaagan Nuur.



Arriving at the guest house of Lagva, to wash up and cool off a bit..... in comfort that will seem almost redundant ...
Then a transfer by car to Ulaan Uul.
Installation in a yurt or a wooden cabin of Oyuna.
With one eye you will be able enjoy this peaceful landscape...

Day 11. Ulaan Uul - Moron

A long day on a track, offset by the beauty of the place before the return to the "civilization".
Moron, the capital of the Khuvsgul department is a village in the middle of a huge valley surrounded by mountain massifs .
Installation at the hotel and shower, an almost unexpected shower!



Ovoo

Day 12. In the morning, passing through the local market where you can sell and buy almost everything.
In the afternoon a local flight Moron - Ulan Baator
Reception at the airport by our staff and settling in at a guest house.
Evening with our team, dinner / concert.

Jour 13. Early morning leave to the airport – international flight



Pricing and presentation:

The price per person is..... € / person for this offer.

The price includes:

- All the transportation. (Driver, fuel and 4x4 vehicle)
- The local flight Arrival / Returning Ulaanbaatar / Moron / Ulaanbaatar
- All accommodation, hotel, guest house, camps and nights in tipis.
- Camping and cooking equipment.
- Food and beverages (tea, coffee, and water)
- On-site activities, horses and of course reindeer, and guides

Mongolian speciality.

- A French, English, or Spanish translator for the time of your stay
- The border permission

Does not include:

International flights

- The Mongolian visa (but we provide the necessary invitation upon request)
- The personal consumption
- In general, anything that is not mentioned in "the price includes " part.

