



A great winter Adventure In Khövsgöl - MONGOLIA

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Crossing Khövsgöl lake, Go & Back By dog sledding

Located at the northern extreme, Kövsgöl is a province of Mongolia and also the name of the largest and deepest lake of the country. This lake was baptized by its former inhabitants "the blue water lake" and popularized later by Russians under the name of "Kossogol".

Much more than in other aimags, this region keeps local traditions. Several ethnies live there. Among many, we can meet the Durkha, the Buriat, and of course Darkhad people, well known as Tsaatan or reindeer herders.

Khövsgöl Lake is baptized "the blue pearl of Mongolia" because of its great beauty and the color of its water.

The area is a National Park that gathers a very rich fauna and a flora, often endemic.

Wide varieties of birds live there, mainly migratory birds which come to nest there, in summer time.

The lake is surrounded by Khodiral Saridag Mountains composed of around ten extinct volcanoes.

Due to its lake, Khövsgöl is one of the rarest areas in Mongolia where people eat fish.

The lake is surrounded by several peaks, reaching 3500m high where you can find eternal snow and ice fields.

This wild place is not well-known and many summits haven't been explored yet.

In March, the ice is absolutely transparent, sliding on it let some strange feeling, blue ice packs on the shore, green color when, we approach of the cost and totally black up to deep water. Weather in March can be hard some times, but generally it's just cold enough to let you appreciate your adventure.

April is a warmer month, less wind, you can feel the sun warming your back, ice cape is moving more than in March, and appear some places with open water that attract a lot of different birds, swan, ducks and end of April, arrive seagulls and cormorants.

To answer to the most popular question: "which month is better to do this trip?" I've no idea, for my part I enjoy all of them.

The lake : Your adventure area

135 kilometers long, around 30 to 37 kilometers large, some 260 m deep in the middle, and more than 60 rivers coming down from mountains & hills mix their water in the lake, to create one of the bigger pure water reservoir in the world. Waters of the lake pour into the river Eg, and then into Selenge, to finish in Baikal lake, what is worth him the nickname of « small brother of the Baikal ». But Khuvsgul is in Mongolia, more than a lake, more than the blue Pearl, Khuvsgul is a myth. To cross this immensity of ice is not insignificant ...



Your guide: Joel Rauzy

Musher of experience with more than 20 years of practice as a professional, Joel participated in some expeditions and "premiere" in several places of the world. He works on the lake for 7 years, knows all corners, and knows how to check the compression crests and to judge the best routes according to the winds.

« Our 2 circuits on Khuvsgul are for me privileged moments, with intense feeling, The lake in winter is nice, splendid ... but much, there is there, a kind of magic created by the elements.

Certainly, the 9 days circuit remains the one I prefer, but other the 6 days is some time more difficult, the dogs do not have any day rest and it is frequent to have to cross zones of rather difficult ice for them as for the musher.

During the 2 months we spend in Khuvsgul, we see the lake changing, evolving, its ice to be transformed, ice cracks to open or to close up, the compression crests growing or to become easier to cross, each circuit is unique and we must conjugate with the fads of the lake, the ice, the winds. Even if "adventure" word became a fashion support and lose its senses, I think that these 2 circuits on the lake of Khuvsgul are a true adventure which I try to propose to neophytes and to more experienced travelers, to make those few days living together with our dogs, unforgettable instants, for the customers, but also for us ».



The dogs : Alaskans & Greenland's

The main part of them are Alaskans Huskies, amazing dynamism and kindness, always ready for job, as hard it can be, always in research of contact with the musher, what also one of the important point of the journey.

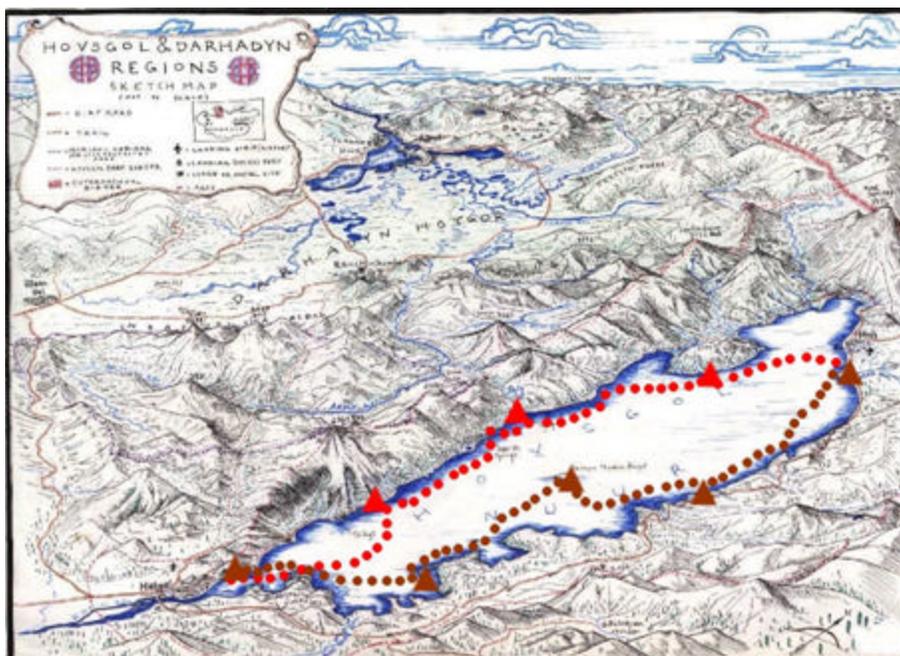
In the team, there are some Greenland dogs , more rustic and wilder than Alaskans, but they have their own good sides.... just need to know how to approach them.

On the sleds, teams are constituted from 5 to 6 dogs, that every apprentice-musher will have to drive and manage during the trip. For other things , to put the harness, to prepare the equipment, to feed this friendly & noisy band, it will be up to you to take in charge or let us do and admire quietly the beauty of landscapes.



A nine days circuit:

9 days to live unique moments on the handlebar of your sled pulled by 6 Alaskan dogs, for discovery of an ice world, in encounter of Mongolian nomadic culture .



Day 1. Reception in the airport

Installation in the hotel in Oulan Bator. Visit of the city and the great Gandan monastery. There are in Oulan Bator 7 main monasteries and several temples and palaces, the most visiting of them are Gandan and Bogdo Khaan, the winter palace, which was started to build in 1890.



Oulan Bator is located on the riversides of the river Tuul, in the past it was called Urga, in honor of the son of a great Mongol Khaan. The name of Oulan Bator was given to the capital of Mongolia, during the 1921's revolution. This name means "red hero".

The streets of the capital are much less eventful in winter than in summer, but it reigns a permanent agitation, also late at night. The city is divided into several quarters with large diversity; it's possible to see yurts in center town. The growth of Oulan Bator is amazing and you will find in the capital all facilities of modern life ...

Day 2. Day in Ulaanbaatar

You'll continue the visit of ulaanbaatar.

In winter, not a lot of possibilities visits except a museum and some monasteries, but a loop through the big market city is really interesting, everything sell, from the little spoon for baby to the ancient silver cup. It's possible to buy there some good equipment against cold weather.



Day 3. Domestic flight to Mörön then, by car to Khatgal.

Reception at Mörön airport and transfer by vehicle to Khatgal. Installation at the guest-house in Khatgal.

Mörön is the main city of the Khövsgöl Province. Khuvsgul province is one of the biggest in Mongolia, with 100000 k2m² and is the most populated with 121 000 inhabitants.

*From Mörön, we will have 100 kilometers, to reach Khatgal, on trails.
Small village at the beginning of the lake, Khatgal is a former Russian colony
that was very prosperous due to the trade between Mongolia and Russia.*



First sight of the Khuvsgul lake

Khövsgöl lake is one of the biggest stock of pure water in the world: 135 km long, 35 km wide, its average depth is 100 meters but can reach 260 meters. Water from Khövsgöl Lake ends in the Baikal Lake, by the Egiin and Selenge rivers.

Day 4. Departure of big adventure

The first day is rather short, only around thirty kilometers to go up to the long estuary and approach the larger part of the lake. This day will also be your introduction in the behavior of dogs' sled driving and harnessing. We'll make a small stopover at the very famous mineral water spring which is in some kilometers from Khatgal. Then a long diagonal to cross the lake and reach Haluun Zaing camp on the West side of the lake. There, the family will receive us. Haluun Zaing is a small yurts' camp in the edge of a lagoon. In winter we shall be the only visitors to dare to be there.

The route is never drawn before, because the ice moves and it is often necessary to zigzag according to the fads of the lake.

Checking of the compression crests before to cross, search the most advantageous place to jump ice crack or "playing" with the wind as same as a boat, to go on faced with the wind.

And the 30 previous kilometers can be very quickly more than 40.



Day 5. Haluun Zaing Camp / Jigleeg

We'll be there in the larger part of the lake, with a feeling of immensity, even if we stay close to the coast.

The stage of the day will be 45 km to join mythical Jigleeg, this zone is called by the name of the small river Jigleeg. It's also a pass, the only passage to reach Tsaagan Nuur, on the other side of the mountain range.

Stopover in the little lake Khar uus annexed to Khuvsgul Nuur, formed by a mineral spring which does not freeze even on the colder days of the winter and which is the shelter of numerous birds, ducks, swans, etc ...

A place of a rare wild beauty.

The lake is in general edged by a crest of bluish ice, formed by the accumulation of blocks of ice pushed there by pressure and uninterrupted movements of the carapace of the lake.

It is not rare to meet around there a horse-sled, or a sidecar, unforeseen meetings which make this adventure more interesting.



The horse-sled is used only in Khuvsgul, in the rest of the country, the horses are shod for ice but the ground and rivers do not allow the use of the sled.

It is one of the specificities of Khuvsgul.



In march, this stage is one of those who reserve most surprises, the violent winds which rush by the 3 or 4 corridors cross through Khorido saridags' range, can give some more difficulties.

These winds are also at the origin of compression crests and ice cracks which block the access to the small lake of Khar uus.

It can happen that natural elements make impossible to access to Jigleeg; but the guide knows the lake very well, and especially all possibilities to face up the unexpected.

The nomadic families which live on the edge of the lake, not far from Khar uus always give a shelter for night, extemporized moments that are often among the most intense instants of circuit.



In Jigleeg, several wooden cabins are builded not far from the lake, in most cases nomads use them only in winter, and we'll spend there the evening with our guests Dolgor and Minjee.

Day 6: Jigleeg / Dolon Uul

Long rise north to reach the peninsula called Dolon Uul at 55km from Jigleeg. A long day with a lot of compression crest to cross. The ice of Khuvsgul is incredibly pure, with imprisoning white air bubbles. The ice bangs are frequent in this area; waves also persist under the thick coat of ice.

Incredible view on the chain of mountain, boarder with the Russia.
The route follows the coast, until Khashim, which is very often the place for our picnic.

From khashim, it remains to cross the gulf of Doloon uul to join Zeminanii Bulan in the right point of Doloon Uul peninsula, around thirty kilometers; far from the coast, as surface is quasi flat just let possible nap leaned on elbows on the sled.
Around thirty kilometers which give instants of a rare tranquility, the dogs take their rhythm and stay on medium speed of 13 or 16km/h depending on the snow conditions.



This north part of the lake is almost entirely snowy during all winter; ambience completely different down to high summits of Khorido Saridag, landscapes of a wild beauty.

We'll arrive at late in the afternoon, this place was very popular during the past time, when horse sleds, was the only way of transportation to cross the lake in winter. Zemianii Bulan offers a good protection against predominant winds and provides dry grass to the horses.

We'll have overnight under tent close to a stony beach, in an unreal atmosphere .

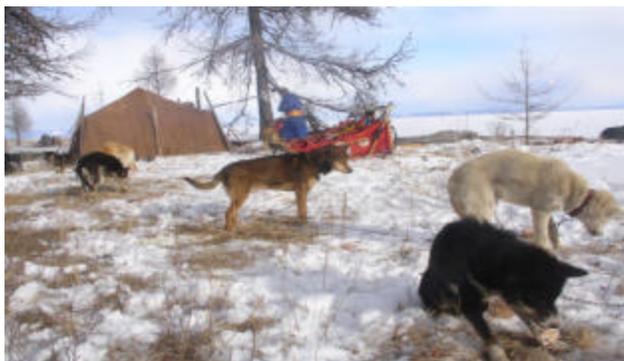


.... **The tent:**

This word could make afraid each winter travelers ...

But there, it is about a tent especially created for us,
Doubled by felt and really well isolated.

Indoors, a little stove, just enough to be able to cook and perfect to spend the night in warm condition.



Day 7: Dolon Uul / Khankh

Crossing of the lake North/northeast, to join Khankh, on the former days called Turt. In this place, the lake is around 30 km wide, but the large parabola we'll have to do to avoid a zone of compression crests which is every year in the same place, brings back stage to almost 40 km.

Very quickly can see the village which stretches on the edge of the cliff, a point that's seems never get closer.



Au-dessus du village, trône en maître des lieux le mythique Monk Saridag, magnifique montagne vénérée par les habitants de Khankh. Un beau sommet qui culmine à presque 3 500m et qui marque la frontière avec la Russie toute proche

Picnic in the middle of the lake, then last straight line towards the camp of « The silver beach ».

Khankh is a border village, small harbor a kind of end-of-world, a magical place where reigns a very particular ambience, a timeless ambience, where everything seems to go slower.

Above the village, the master of the places, the mythical Monk Saridag, splendid mountain venerated by the peoples lives in Khankh. A nice summit which culminates in almost 3 500m and that marks border with the very close Russia.



Very Russian reception in the yurts camp of the silver beach, after those last rudes days, you will appreciate comfort of a warm yurt and toilets and for sure, you'll never forget the "Bagna" (Russian sauna)..



DAY 8: Day for relax and fishing under ice , in KHankh

Fishing under ice is one of the Khuvsguls' specialties.

In the extremity north of the lake, the Ikh Khoroo river comes to pour out its waters creating even in winter, a reservoir of food for fishes. It is there that we shall go to dig a hall in the carapace of ice, to discover the quiet charm of the under ice fishing and try to bring back some nice graylings for our next days barbecues.

On evening, preparations for the next day departure.



Day 9: Departure for the route back towards Khatgal – Khankh/Maint

Passage at the bottom of the hill where raised 13 Ovoos, relics of a glorious epoch, the ancient traces of the border of Chinggis Khaan Mongolian empire.

The empire of the big Khaan being constituted by 13 provinces; every foreigner crossing this border knew so that he enters in the territory of 13 Aimags.

Long trip in the wide to join a small gulf, not far from the place called Sevsuul.



The coast is very serrated, succession of gulfs and coves, sandy beaches and small cliffs. The fads of the ice will guide our route through the compression crests of and crack, before to reach the small cove of Maint, in feet from a hill which will protect us from the wind.

Wonderful view on the Khorido Saridag mountain .



Overnight on tent.

Day 10: Maint/Dalayn Modon Huys

We'll take direction to the wide, straight to the centre of the lake, to join the big island, Dalayn Modon Huys, which means the «wooden son of the ocean », also called the belly button of the lake.

This island measures about 3 km in diameter, it is a very wooded zone on which live deers and roebuck, it is not rare to see traces of wolves there, which come to go hunting.

The island is one of the most protected areas of the lake.

View is splendid, with in the bottom all the 3000 m high summits that separate Khövsgöl lake from the Darkhad depression.

It is on the South side of the island that we'll build our bivouac, not far from a shamanist site, a tomb and some totems which give an ambience of corsairs' movies..



Sometimes it's possible to notice the other island which is on around 40 kms. It is not rare to feel some vibrations owed to the crack of the ice. Strange noises which come from the bottom of the lake ... Unforgettable instants!

Day 11: Dalayn Modon Huys/Khelengiin Uzuur

New route towards east coast of the lake, to join a nice cove where Kheg Tsar river throws.

Long stage of more than 50 kms.

After some fifteen kilometers, Radan Khuy, the small island, the « stony son » appear clearly and quickly becomes the point of the quest.

Finally we can see the details of the island which is just a stony reef where sea gulls and cormorants come to reproduce and live all summer.

Another dozen kilometers to reach Khelengiin Uzuur, located on a wooded peninsula, it there in this wild place we'll spend the overnight under the tent.



Almost deserted, the coast is very wooded and marshy; it is an area where wild fauna is very important.

Arrival in Khatgal on the end of afternoon.

A good tea to recover of this long day, then daily tasks, installs the dogs, feed them, line up the equipment, etc ...

On that point we'll have already gone through more than 250 km on the ice of Khuvsgul. Dog sledding will be for you an acquired technique and you'll be able to fully appreciate the beauty of landscapes.

Day 12: Khelengiin Uzuur/Khatgal

The last part of the journey on the ice of Khuvsgul ...

Following coast in this area in the snaky outlines where there are some good fishing spots .

A stopover for picnic on the rocky Radan Suum that marks the end of the lake and the entry in the estuary.



Descent of the estuary to finally arrive at the little village.

Some boats are there, blocked by the ice, they are the relics of flourishing trade epoch.

Only one of these big ships will sails in summer.

Arrival in Khatgal in the afternoon.

Installation in the guest house.



Day 13 – Horse ridding day in Khatgal

It was not reasonable to leave Mongolia without having at least once , a horse ridding daysat on the back of the famous small Mongolian horse.

Trek on walking rhythm of your horseor faster, according to your desires, to discover the deep countryside and of nomadic life far from the lake.

Overnight on guest-house.

Day 14: Transfer to Ulaanbaatar

A little more than two hours on a difficult trail, compensated by a superb landscape.

Lunch in Moron, then direction the small airport.

Transfer by air to Oulan Bator, arrived in the capital late in the afternoon.
Installation in the hotel.

Jour 15: International flight



LOGISTIQUE

Dates : Departure from beginning of March until end of April 2012

Group: 2 to 5 persons, + Joël, the musher. One person by sled.

Activity: 8 days dog sledding

Price: ... **\$/person**

Supplement single room in Oulan Bator

Including:

- French and English-speaking Musher & mountain guide
- Logistics and transfers
- Domestic flights UB/Mörön/UB
- Equipment for dog sledding
- Camps in Khövsgöl
- Overnights & meals
- National parks fees
- Special border permits

Not Including:

- International flight and airport taxes
- Personal conveniences (sleeping bag, mattress...)
- Personal insurance
- Everything that is not mentioned in the "Including" section.

