

LEICA AKADEMIE Belgium & Luxembourg

Mongolia

A Leica Akademie Travel Experience

A Journey into the Country of the Khans

A fifteen-day documentary expedition through Mongolia's far west, led by Jeroen Hanselaer, Yoss Spencer, and Rich Beal.

Price	€6,550 per person
Duration	15 days
Dates	31 July – 14 August 2027
Places	6 to 10 participants — close to one-on-one mentoring
Languages	Dutch, French and English. German on request.

Overview

There are photography tours, and then there is this.

Mongolia's far west is one of the least-visited regions on earth — not because it is difficult to love, but because it is genuinely difficult to reach. The landscapes shift from volcanic plateau to alpine forest to salt-water inland sea to desert dune in the space of days. The people who live here — nomadic herders, eagle hunters, shamans — are not performers. They are simply living, as their families have lived for centuries, largely undisturbed by the outside world.

We are here to photograph and film that life. Not to observe it from a distance, but to enter it — slowly, respectfully, with intention.

This is a working expedition for serious image-makers. Over fifteen days, you will travel with a team of three specialists who between them cover documentary photography, documentary filmmaking, and an intimate, ground-level knowledge of Mongolia itself. The workshops happen in the field, beside the subject, in the available light. The reviews happen in the evening, around a shared meal, with work worth discussing. You travel with Leica Q, SL and M systems at your disposal — and the people who know how to use them.

We keep the group small deliberately. Mongolia rewards patience and proximity. So do we.

The Team

Jeroen Hanselaer

Photography

Jeroen brings twenty-six years of practice across disciplines that rarely share the same career: fashion, editorial portraiture, documentary, and humanitarian work for organisations including the United Nations and GIZ. That range is not incidental — it is the lens through which he teaches. Where most photographers master one grammar, Jeroen has spent decades learning several, and the ability to move between them, to read a situation and choose the right register, is precisely what he passes on.

Mongolia is not new to him. He has already made the journey, travelled this route, worked the light of the western steppe, and returned with a body of work made on the same roads you are about to travel. Some of that work will become part of the teaching material on this trip. You will not be shown slides from somewhere else. You will be shown what this specific landscape gives to someone who knows how to ask for it.

Jeroen is Manager of the Leica Akademie Belgium & Luxembourg.

Yoss Spencer

Videography & Film

Born Djessoba N'nambé on 27 June 1991 in Lomé, Togo, Yoss Spencer taught himself filmmaking through research, instinct, and the kind of persistence that formal education rarely produces. He refined his craft under director Steven AF at Studio SunLight before founding his own production company, Yoss Spencer Movies, in 2015.

What followed was a decade of sustained output across West and Central Africa — music videos, institutional films, documentaries, commercial work — for artists including Koffi Olomide and King Mensah, and for institutions including the United States Embassy in Togo, where he was invited as a trainer at a video editing workshop as early as 2016. He has been recognised three times as best director at the All Music Awards.

He controls every stage of the image: directing, operating camera, editing, colour grading. That end-to-end command means the work never passes through hands that don't understand it.

Rich Beal

Mongolia

Rich is the founder of Absolute Nomads and has lived in Ulaanbaatar for over a decade. He is one of the world's most experienced tour leaders — over twenty years in the field across Central Asia, recognised as Tour Leader of the Year in 2010. Mongolia is his home, but his expertise spans the full breadth of the region: from the Mongolian steppe to Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and beyond. He knows which family will welcome a small group of photographers without performing for them. He knows which roads are passable in July and which are not. He knows what to order, what to bring, what to leave behind, and when to simply be quiet and let the landscape do its work. He is also, quietly, a photographer himself — which means he understands what you are trying to do, even when you can't explain it.

Rich doesn't teach photography; he opens doors that remain closed to everyone else.

What's Included

€6,550 per person

Included

— Jeroen Hanselaer — documentary photography mentor

— Yoss Spencer — documentary videography mentor

— Rich Beal — Mongolia specialist and expedition leader

— English-speaking local guide

— All listed meals

— Accommodation throughout

— Internal flights

— All included sightseeing

— All taxes and entrance fees to protected areas

— Leica Equipment: exclusive free loan of Q, SL and M systems with matching lenses throughout the expedition. Details before departure. All other brands equally welcome.

Not Included

— International flights

— Single supplement

— Extra nights' accommodation

— Snacks and personal purchases

— Tips

— Camera equipment — all brands welcome. Please bring your own gear, SD cards, and if possible a laptop for editing. Film photography is warmly welcomed.


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Itinerary Overview

Fifteen days. Three specialists. One of the most remote routes in Central Asia.

Day 1	Arrival in Ulaanbaatar
Day 2	Explore Ulaanbaatar
Day 3	From Modern Capital to Ancient Capital
Day 4	From the Ancient Empire to Volcanic Fault Lines
Day 5	Volcanic Hike & Mountain Journey
Day 6	Mongolia's Inland Sea
Day 7	Where the Road Ends: Off-Road to Khovd
Day 8	The City of Khovd
Day 9	Into the Wilderness
Day 10	Become a Yak Herder
Day 11	Hiking & A Nomadic Table
Day 12	Khovd Market
Day 13	Land of the Eagle Hunters
Day 14	Return to Ulaanbaatar
Day 15	Departure

DAY 1

Arrival in Ulaanbaatar

Mongolia begins the moment you land.

After your transfer from the airport and time to settle in, we'll take an optional afternoon stroll to Sukhbaatar Square — the city's beating heart, named after the revolutionary hero Damdin Sükhbaatar, whose statue anchors its centre. At the northern end, Genghis Khan and his generals watch over the square from a monumental plinth, Soviet architecture pressing against the glass towers that have grown up around them in the decades since. In summer, the square is alive with colour: locals in traditional dress marking graduations, weddings, ordinary Tuesdays. It is, without trying to be, one of the most photographically generous public spaces in Asia.

In the late afternoon we'll sit down together — a conversation about what we're here to make, and how.

Tonight is yours. Dinner is not included on Day 1 — this is your last evening alone before the journey begins in earnest. We're happy to suggest where to eat.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel

Meals included: Lunch

DAY 2

Explore Ulaanbaatar

We leave the hotel on foot. When Ulaanbaatar was planned and built in the 1950s, it was designed as a city without cars — which means that today, walking is often faster, and always more interesting.

Our first destination is the State Department Store, a Soviet-era institution that has outlasted its origins and remains a genuine crossroads of local life. From there we follow Peace Avenue toward the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, the city's largest and most important Buddhist complex, moving through the old Soviet housing districts where the decaying facades have become canvases for some of the city's most arresting street art.

At the monastery, we'll spend time with the resident monks going about their daily practice — an introduction to the kind of access and patience that will define the weeks ahead. The main temple rewards careful attention. So does the extraordinary gilded statue housed within it.

Back at the hotel, we'll hold our first formal workshop of the trip — technique, approach, and a first look at what we've made together today.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel

Meals included: Lunch, Dinner



DAY 3

From Modern Capital to Ancient Capital

We leave early, ahead of the city's traffic, and head west toward Karakorum — the ancient capital of the Mongolian Empire, the city from which Ögedei Khan once governed the largest contiguous land empire in human history.

What remains of Karakorum today is, by the standards of what it once was, modest: the walled Erdene Zuu Monastery and a scattering of archaeological finds. But the weight of the place is felt. We'll have time to walk it properly.

The drive itself is the beginning of your education in Mongolian landscape. As the city falls away, the steppe opens — rolling hills, rocky outcrops, the first traditional gers appearing as white punctuation marks across the grass. We'll stop at the Mongol Els dunes, a small and genuinely strange desert system rising improbably from the surrounding green steppe, where a chance encounter with a camel herder is more likely than not.

This evening we arrive at our first ger camp — not a hotel with a Mongolian aesthetic, but the real structure, the real material, the real thing. We'll review the day's work together before sleep.

Accommodation: Urguu Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 4

From the Ancient Empire to Volcanic Fault Lines

We return to Erdene Zuu in the morning, ideally in time for the monks' prayer. Then the archaeological museum — small, unhurried, full of things worth looking at closely.

From Karakorum we push west, following the Orkhon River and its UNESCO-listed valley. The landscape shifts register here. This is Mongolia's heartland — nomadic families working terrain that has been worked the same way for centuries, the kind of continuity that is increasingly rare anywhere on earth and that the camera, used well, has a responsibility to honour.

By late afternoon the volcanic past of this region begins to assert itself. The Chuluutiin Gol gorge — a 30-metre fault line carved alongside the River of Pearls — is a genuine surprise, deep-sided and quiet. We'll stop. We'll work. We end the day at Khorgo ger camp, the dormant volcano above us, waiting for morning.

Accommodation: Khorgo Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 5

Volcanic Hike & Mountain Journey

We start the day as it deserves — climbing Khorgo. The volcano's forested slopes lead to a crater rim, and the view from the top is the kind of thing that reminds you why you carry a camera. Sulphurous, quiet, genuinely strange. We'll work it properly before descending.

From Khorgo the landscape shifts again — granite peaks, pine forest, alpine meadows, and the ever-present ger, white against green, smoke rising in the cold morning air.

We'll pass through some of the remoter towns along this route, places that look, at first glance, like they belong to another century. They are someone's home. We move through them with respect and genuine curiosity, and the photographs that result from that approach are different from the ones that don't.

Today's pace is deliberately slower. The objective is to find a campsite worthy of the surrounding landscape — which in this part of Mongolia means being genuinely spoiled for choice. We'll make camp in the late afternoon, spend the remaining light working the surroundings, and eat well under an open sky.

Accommodation: Camping

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Mongolia's Inland Sea

We head north into Uvs Province — a remote region of lakes, mountains and dunes that few western travellers ever reach. The people who live here have largely not encountered foreign visitors. That is not a selling point. It is a responsibility, and we treat it as one.

Our destination is Khyargas Lake, formed by glacial action thousands of years ago, its water salt-heavy and vast enough to feel oceanic. The Mongolians who summer here know exactly what they have. We'll swim in it — bracing, clarifying, worth it — and then work the shoreline for the afternoon photography session, the light on the water changing by the minute as the sun drops.

We camp on a spit of land jutting into the lake. The sunset here, yellow and orange fracturing across the surface, is the kind of light you came for.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 7

Where the Road Ends: Off-Road to Khovd

The tarmac ends this morning. What follows is a full day of genuine off-road driving — sand, steppe, mud, river crossings — the kind of travel that reminds you how large and how empty this country actually is. Rich knows this route. We are in good hands.

As we approach Khovd the road reasserts itself and the landscape narrows into valleys. Arriving in summer, the riverbanks are lined with gers — families who move down to the water each year with their herds, the city briefly doubling in its population of canvas and felt.

Khovd is a regional capital that has retained the feel of a frontier town. We'll walk the centre, find its edges, eat well. This evening, a local family hosts us for Khorkhog — Mongolian barbecue, stones heated in the fire, meat slow-cooked in a sealed vessel. It is one of the great meals of Central Asia.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 8

The City of Khovd

Khovd gives us a full day and we use all of it.

The morning belongs to a local shaman. Mongolian shamanism has existed alongside Buddhism here for centuries and in this part of the country it remains a living practice, not a cultural exhibit. The ceremonial dress, unchanged over generations, is extraordinary to photograph. More extraordinary is the person wearing it.

After lunch, we attend a performance of throat-singing — khoomei, the practice of producing multiple pitches simultaneously, a tradition that has defined Mongolian musical identity since the time of Chinggis Khan. We'll meet the performers, hear the history, and spend time with people for whom this is not performance but inheritance.

Back at the hotel in the late afternoon, we review the day's work together before dinner with a local family in their ger. The hospitality of a Mongolian home is something no briefing can adequately prepare you for.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 9

Into the Wilderness

We leave Khovd behind and head into territory that is, by any reasonable measure, off the map. Rocky mountains, clear rivers, no roads worth the name.

Before we go, we stop for supplies and for gifts — we never arrive at a nomadic family empty-handed. It is a matter of basic respect, and Rich will make sure we get it right.

Our hosts today are a family of yak herders who move through this landscape seasonally, following the same patterns their parents and grandparents followed. We'll be introduced properly, spend the afternoon settling in, and make photographs in the remaining light — the family going about the end of their day, the herd moving, the mountains holding everything in place.

We camp alongside the family ger.

Accommodation: Camping

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 10

Become a Yak Herder

For our hosts, today is a working day like any other. Milking before dawn, animals to move, food to prepare, the ten thousand small tasks that constitute a life lived close to the land. We are here to help, not to watch.

This is where the photography becomes something else. When you are working alongside people rather than circling them with a camera, something shifts — in them, in you, and in the images.

In the evening we eat with the family again, and prepare to move deeper into the countryside.

Accommodation: Camping

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner





DAY 11

Hiking & A Nomadic Table

We say goodbye to the yak herders and move on to another family living further into the mountains — a location chosen, in part, because the landscape around it is exceptional for both photography and for simply being alive in.

The afternoon is yours: hike, shoot, find a vantage point and stay with it. The mountains here reward patience in exactly the way that good documentary photography rewards patience.

In the evening, we gather for a meal that is prepared with us rather than for us — the family butchering, cooking, sharing the methods and the meaning of what is on the table. Traditional Mongolian crème. Dishes that have no equivalent outside this region. It is also, quietly, a farewell to the wilderness before we turn back toward Khovd tomorrow.

Accommodation: Camping

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 12

Khovd Market

The road back to Khovd is off-road until it isn't, and then we're in the city again — which, after several days in the mountains, feels briefly like arriving in a metropolis.

The market is the first stop and the right one. This is not a tourist market. It is where Khovd buys what Khovd needs: children's clothing, bicycles, traditional deels in every colour the fabric comes in. The winding alleys and the traders who work them are the documentary subject of the morning, and we'll spend real time here.

From the market we move to a traditional clothing workshop — deel made to measure, the seamstresses working with the kind of focused speed that makes for compelling photographs. The colours are not subtle. Neither is the craft.

Accommodation: Steppe Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 13

Land of the Eagle Hunters

We leave Khovd and drive north into Bayan-Ölgii — the furthest reach of the journey, a province where the Kazakh culture of the eagle hunters has been preserved with a tenacity that speaks for itself.

Eagle hunting is one of the most photographed traditions in Central Asia and also one of the most misrepresented. What we are here for is not the spectacle but the person — the hunter in his full ceremonial dress, his eagle on his arm, and the conversation that Rich makes possible between us. We'll have the afternoon and the evening. There is no rush.

We stay the night at the eagle hunter's own ger camp. The final meal of the expedition is eaten here, under the same sky that has been above us for two weeks, before the long return begins tomorrow.

Accommodation: Eagle Hunter's Ger Camp

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 14

Return to Ulaanbaatar

We fly back to the capital, arriving just after midday, the city feeling genuinely different after what preceded it.

The afternoon is for the final edit session — everything on the table, the best work selected, the journey as a whole reviewed with fresh eyes and the distance of two weeks. This is where the teaching comes full circle: not what you set out to make, but what you actually made, and what that tells you about where you are as an image-maker.

In the evening, dinner together — the whole team, the whole group — and the stories that only make sense now that they're over.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 15

Departure

All transfers to the airport are included regardless of flight time. If you have a later flight and hours to spare, Rich will know exactly how to use them.

Mongolia has a way of staying with you. The work you leave with will tell you why.

Meals included: Breakfast

