

MONGOLIA 12-days expedition
SNOW LEOPARD & PALLAS' CAT
24.08 – 04.09.2025 with Miksture/MWA



The Dream of the Snow Leopard – and Pallas' Cat

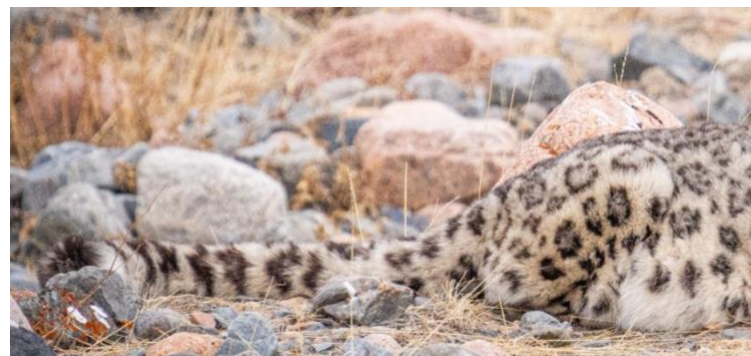
Welcome to a unique journey through the wild and untouched landscapes of western Mongolia, where we will search for one of nature's most mythical, enigmatic, and beautiful creatures: the Snow Leopard.

The snow leopard is one of the world's most mythical animals—a symbol of beauty and the mystery of nature. Spotting this shy, elegant creature with its distinctive fur, mesmerizing blue eyes, and long tail is a dream for many. Mongolia is a land of dramatic contrasts, where the steppes meet the mountains, and the sky seems to stretch endlessly.

Upon arriving in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, we will take a domestic flight to Hovd in Mongolia's far west to search for snow leopards in the pristine wilderness of the Altay Mountains, which hold approximately 20% of the world's estimated snow leopard population. The Altay Mountains stretch across Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia, forming an impressive range with diverse landscapes—from snow-capped peaks and deep valleys to high-altitude grasslands. In this remote corner of Mongolia, we seek the elusive snow leopard along with other iconic wildlife such as Pallas' cat, Siberian ibex, Mongolian saiga antelope, Przewalski's horse, argali mountain sheep, Altai red deer, and wolves. The area also hosts a fascinating variety of birdlife, providing excellent opportunities for observation. A detailed bird list will be provided prior to departure

This journey takes us to a rugged yet simple world, free of dangerous elements. A significant advantage of this trip is that we travel in summer. Traditionally, snow leopard expeditions occur in winter, when snow drives the leopards' prey into valleys, making the cats easier to locate. In western Mongolia, however, we rely on knowledgeable locals who understand the snow leopard's habits and territory. The Altay Mountains are also lower and more accessible than the Himalayas. Remarkably, we can search for snow leopards in summer attire, though western Mongolia remains both barren and windy.

This trip has the character of an expedition, where climate and weather require patience and understanding from you, the traveler. We cannot predict the weather or exact conditions, nor can we say precisely when we will arrive or how long each day's foray will be. What we can promise, however, is a breathtaking experience in a remote area rarely visited by humans, led by an experienced team in a region of outstanding nature and wildlife, with a high success rate for snow leopard sightings. Our camp is comfortable, featuring warm gers (traditional felt tents) and delicious, freshly prepared meals. This is an active travel



experience, with ample opportunities for easy walks in the surrounding area.

While it is impossible to guarantee sightings of snow leopards or other wildlife, our experienced team is well-versed in tracking these elusive animals. We understand the snow leopard's habits and movement patterns intimately, but we never disturb this shy and vulnerable species. Notably, the snow leopard's nature and tolerance toward humans is unique. Unlike its African cousins, snow leopards have never been documented to harm people. Though they are unafraid, they maintain a respectful distance, like all wild animals.

Before departure, Miksture provides detailed information about appropriate clothing and what to bring. You don't need to be a top athlete or marathon runner to join this incredible journey. The key requirements are patience, a bit of persistence, and a positive outlook.

On this expedition, we venture deep into the heart of the snow leopard's domain, where our team's expertise transforms the chances of an encounter from nearly impossible to truly possible. Sometimes, dreams do come true. It's in these moments that the fantasies formed at home emerge vividly, bringing joy and excitement—and a realization that nothing is impossible.



Highlights

- * Stunning landscapes: Mongolian Altai mountains, mountain lakes, and rivers
- * A unique tour offering close contact with Mongolia's wild nature, beautiful landscapes, and rich culture
- * Rare wildlife sightings, featuring the elusive Snow Leopard and Pallas' Cat as highlights, with chances to see Gray Wolf, Corsac Fox, Wild (Przewalski's) Horse, Wapiti, Siberian Ibex, Goitered Gazelle, Argali, Mongolian Gazelle, Saiga, Tolai Hare, Pallas's Pika, Tarbagan Marmot, Daurian Hedgehog, Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, Northern Three-toed Jerboa, and Brandt's Vole
- * Unique birds (species seen on our previous tour): Swan Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Baikal Teal, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Red-crested Pochard, White-headed Duck, Altai Snowcock, Japanese Quail, Hill Pigeon, Oriental Turtle Dove, White-naped Crane, Common Crane, Horned Grebe, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-necked Stint, White-winged Tern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Dalmatian Pelican, Bearded Vulture, Crested Honey Buzzard, Cinereous Vulture, Booted Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Golden Eagle,

Japanese Sparrowhawk, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Black-eared Kite, White-tailed Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Little Owl, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Amur Falcon, Saker Falcon, Great Grey Shrike, Isabelline Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Mongolian Ground Jay, Daurian Jackdaw, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Mongolian Lark, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Pallas's Leaf Warbler, Dusky Warbler, Arctic Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, White's Thrush, Eyebrowed Thrush, Black-throated Thrush, Red-throated Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat, Taiga Flycatcher, Daurian Redstart, Guldenstädt's Redstart, Pere David's, Brown Accentor, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Richard's Pipit, Blyth's Pipit, Mongolian Finch, Oriental Greenfinch, Pine Bunting, Meadow Bunting, Grey-necked Bunting, Ortolan Bunting, Little Bunting, Yellow-browed Bunting, Black-faced Bunting, Pallas's Reed Bunting, etc.

* Experience nomadic life—outside the cities, we support the local population by staying in a ger camp run by Mongolian nomads.

Mongolia—home to more than just fascinating wildlife...

The Altay Mountains are home to diverse and fascinating wildlife—and to resilient people whose lives are intertwined with the harsh yet beautiful landscape. The communities here, including Kazakhs, Tuvians, and Mongols, uphold a rich mosaic of cultural and social practices

rooted in their nomadic lifestyle. Adaptation and ingenuity define their survival in one of the world's most extreme environments.

Nomadic pastoralism is the primary economic activity in the Altay, with families raising goats, sheep, yaks, camels, and horses, all vital for providing milk, meat, wool, and transportation. Kazakhs, the largest ethnic group in the region, are known for their skills in hunting, shepherding, and horse breeding. Their lifestyle aligns closely with the mountains' seasonal rhythms, making them adept riders and caretakers of the land.

Interestingly, the snow leopard preys on horses, creating tension between this iconic predator and local horse owners. In recent years, these conflicts have been largely mitigated through compensation initiatives supported by the Mongolian government, foreign organizations, and ecotourism. This approach balances conservation efforts with the livelihoods of the people sharing their habitat with the elusive snow leopard

The Tuvians, a smaller ethnic group, share many cultural similarities with both the Mongols and other Siberian peoples but differ significantly in their cultural practices and lifestyles from the Kazakhs and Mongols. They speak Tuvian, which features notable differences in dialect and vocabulary compared to Kazakh. In contrast, Mongolians speak Mongolian, a language from a completely different family. All the peoples of the Altay Mountains are deeply connected to their historical roots and have adapted to the harsh mountainous environment. In this

region, the Mongols primarily focus on breeding yaks and camels.

The nomads of the Altay Mountains live in traditional tents called gers (or yurts), which are easy to move and adapt to seasonal changes. A ger is a circular, tent-like structure made of wooden frames covered with felt and canvas. These homes are designed to withstand the extreme mountain climate, keeping them warm in winter and cool in summer. During our visit to the region, we will stay in a smaller *ger*-camp.

The Snow Leopard

The snow leopard is one of the world's most fascinating and enigmatic large predators. Its ability to survive in some of the harshest and most inaccessible areas on Earth makes it unique. Conserving and protecting the snow leopard requires a holistic approach that involves local communities, scientific research, and international cooperation to ensure this remarkable cat remains part of our natural world.

The snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) belongs to the cat family (Felidae) and is placed within the genus *Panthera*, which also includes tigers, lions, jaguars, and leopards. Previously, the snow leopard was classified in its own genus, *Uncia*, but genetic studies have shown that it is more closely related to other large cats in the genus *Panthera*.

The snow leopard is adapted to life in high, cold mountain areas. It inhabits some of the world's highest mountain ranges, including the Himalayas, Altay,

Tian Shan, Pamir, Karakoram, and Kunlun. These ranges stretch across 12 countries, including Mongolia, China, Nepal, India, Bhutan, Russia, and several Central Asian nations. Snow leopards prefer altitudes between 3,000 and 4,500 meters but can be found at both higher and lower elevations depending on the season and prey availability.

Their bodies are covered in thick, dense fur that varies in color from gray to light gray, with black rosettes and spots providing camouflage in rocky terrain. They have short legs with large paws that act as natural snowshoes and a long, bushy tail that ensures balance on steep surfaces and serves as a "rudder" when hunting. The tail can also be used to cover the animal's nose and mouth in cold weather. Adult snow leopards typically weigh between 27 and 55 kg, and their body length (excluding the tail) varies from 90 to 115 cm. The tail can be up to 100 cm long. Their relatively small ears and nose help reduce heat loss in the cold climate.

The snow leopard is a solitary and territorial species. Each snow leopard has a large home range that can vary from 30 to 1,000 square kilometers, depending on prey density and landscape features. It is most active at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) but can also be active during the day and night. The snow leopard is an opportunistic predator whose diet mainly consists of game, sheep, and goats, such as Bharal (Blue Sheep), Argali (Mountain Sheep), and Ibex. It also hunts smaller mammals, including marmots, hares, and birds. The snow leopard is known for its

ability to take down prey weighing up to three times its own weight and can jump up to 15 meters in a single leap.

The Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*), commonly referred to as Saiga, is the only



The snow leopard is classified as "Vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The main threats to the snow leopard include habitat loss due to human activity, poaching for its fur and bones, and conflicts with local communities when snow leopards attack livestock. Conservation efforts focus on protecting and restoring the snow leopard's natural habitat, reducing conflicts between people and snow leopards through compensation programs for lost livestock, and combating the illegal trade in snow leopard parts. International collaborations and organizations, such as the Snow Leopard Trust and the Snow Leopard Conservancy, play a crucial role in these efforts.

antelope species native to Europe. This species is typically divided into two subspecies: *Saiga tatarica tatarica* and *Saiga tatarica mongolica*, the latter of which is found only in Mongolia. Recently, both subspecies have sometimes been classified as separate species: *Saiga tatarica* and *Saiga mongolica*

Day-to-Day Program

Day 1: Arrival and Flight to Hovd (2 hours)

Welcome to Mongolia! The journey begins upon arrival at Chinggis Khaan International Airport in Ulaanbaatar. Miksture Tours can assist with booking



international flights. On the same day, we will fly for two hours to Hovd, the gateway to the Altai Mountains. Hovd (also known as Khovd or Chovd) is the capital of the province of the same name, with approximately 87,000 inhabitants and covering an area of 76,100 km². Upon arrival in Hovd, we will drive for 1-2 hours directly to our Ger camp in the mountains for accommodation. (Meals: BLD)

Day 2 to 6: Mongolian Altai Mountains and Nearby Lakes

We will spend the next five days exploring the Altai Mountains and searching for the elusive snow leopard and other fascinating animals. The mountains are home to key prey species for the snow leopard, including the Siberian ibex, Mongolian marmots, and the Altai Snowcock. Birdwatching is also a highlight, offering plenty of opportunities for enthusiasts to observe diverse avian life. Each day will typically begin with an early morning meal, followed by drives into the area

to scout for interesting mammals and birds.

We drive in all-terrain 4x4 vehicles, which allows us to avoid long hikes and minimizes disturbance to the leopards. While scouting for the snow leopard, we drive to higher locations where we can survey large areas. We also look for the Alpine pika, Pallas's pika, Tolai hare, Mongolian marmot, long-tailed ground squirrel, red fox, wolf, steppe polecat, Mongolian saiga, snow leopard, and Siberian ibex.

Local snow leopard scouts carry out their daily work and are highly likely to locate a snow leopard for us, as they know the leopards' haunts better than anyone else. Once they make contact, we drive to the location. This allows us to focus on observing other exciting animals in the lower semi-desert areas.

Here, we may encounter the critically endangered Mongolian saiga *S. t. Mongolica*, which many consider to be a separate species. Around the large lakes, we search for Bar-headed Goose,

Pallas Sandgrouse, Demoiselle Crane, Long-toed Sandpiper, Red-necked Sandpiper, Pallas Gull, Henderson's Ground-Jay, White-headed Yellow Wagtail, Saker Falcon, and many others.

the next few days, we will explore the mountains in pursuit of our goal: to observe the Pallas's cat. The surrounding landscape is breathtaking, with rocky ravines, grassy ridges, steppes, and sandy desert.



In the desert-like environment, we may also spot smaller mammals such as the Long-eared Hedgehog, Pallid Ground Squirrel, Midday Jird, Mongolian Five-toed Jerboa, Gobi Jerboa and Corsac Fox. Overnight in a ger camp. B, L, D

Dag 7-10: Margaz-bjergene (Pallas's Cat Camp)

In the afternoon, we pack up and leave our ger camp, continuing through a dry steppe landscape to the Margaz Mountains. Here, we settle into another comfortable ger camp, managed by friendly and hospitable Mongolian nomads and rangers. Over

The Pallas's cat (*Otocolobus manul*), also known as the Manul, was named after Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811), a German zoologist, botanist, and geographer who first described the cat in 1776. Pallas was invited to Saint Petersburg by Tsarina Catherine II of Russia in 1767, where he served as a professor and led expeditions to Siberia and southern Russia.

The Pallas's cat belongs to the family Felidae and is classified under the genus *Otocolobus*. It is a small, compact wild cat, measuring 46–65 cm in length and weighing 2.5–4.5 kg. Its



thick, greyish fur with dark stripes on its head and legs provides excellent camouflage. The dense coat and layer of fat protect it from extreme temperatures in its habitat, ranging from -50°C in winter to 40°C in summer. The Pallas's cat has short legs, a flat face, and small, round ears placed low on its head. Unlike most cats with vertical pupils, the Pallas's cat has round pupils and, when startled, emits a sound resembling a barking dog more than a cat. Typically, if frightened, it seeks shelter in a nearby rock cave or behind rocks rather than running. In one instance, a Danish tour guide encountered a Pallas's cat in western Mongolia that retreated to a rock cave, allowing photos to be taken from a distance. After about an hour, it emerged and continued its daily activities.

Birds we may encounter include the Chukar, Hill Pigeon, Pallas Sandgrouse,

Lammergeier, Cinerous Vulture, Golden Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Little Owl, Saker Falcon, Alpine Chough, Mongolian Lark, Asian Short-toed Lark, Alpine Accentor, Kozlov's Accentor, Brown Accentor, Pere Davids Snowfinch, Mongolian Finch and Meradow Bunting.

Mammals: Pallas's Pika, Tolai Hare, Red Fox, Siberian Ibex, and Asian Wapiti, Corsac Fox, Steppe Polecat, Pallas's Cat, and Wolf.

Day 11: Ulaangom – Ulaanbaatar (Domestic Flight)

After breakfast, we will drive to Ulaangom airport and fly to Ulaanbaatar. Arrival time is yet to be determined. In Ulaanbaatar, we will stay at a 3-star hotel and enjoy a farewell dinner at a restaurant. B, L, D

Day 12: Journey Home – End of Trip

drinks and snacks will always be on hand.

Accommodation: In Ulaanbaatar, we will stay in clean, comfortable 3- to 4-



Transport: We will travel in 4x4 vehicles. Shorter hikes are also possible.

Meals: Nine breakfasts, nine lunches, and nine dinners are included in the price, covering all main meals during your stay in Mongolia. Our chef at the ger camp can accommodate special dietary needs—please inform us of your requirements in advance so we can prepare accordingly. Fresh fruit will be available daily, but meal variety may differ from European standards. Hot

star hotels, which may be slightly below international standards. During our exploration of the Altai Mountains, we will stay in a community-based ger camp. This camp, set on a hillside with expansive views, offers clean and cozy traditional Mongolian gers with two beds. Gers will be heated by a stove. European-style toilets, handwashing facilities, and a shower will be available at the camp, situated at an average altitude of 2,000 meters above sea level.

Weather: Mongolia, known as the "Land of the Blue Sky," enjoys sunny days two-thirds of the year. Days are

generally sunny and cool, while nights are significantly colder. Mountain temperatures will be lower, and rain is possible. Climate data is from Hovd (2005–2015) and Ulaanbaatar (1985–2015) from timeanddate.com.

Culture and Archaeology: The area where we search for snow leopards is home to the Zahchin ethnic group, known for their bravery and skill in battle. If you'd like to visit a Zahchin family, please ask your guides. The region is also rich in archaeological sites, with ancient tombs, deer stones, and petroglyphs, some dating as far back as the 1st century AD.

Geology: The Altai Mountains formed during mountain-building processes 500–300 million years ago, later eroding into a peneplain. In the Quaternary period (last 2.6 million years), tectonic activity created magnificent peaks. Earthquakes are common along the region's fault zone; the most recent occurred near Lake Zaysan in 1990. Glaciation carved the mountains into rugged shapes and transformed valleys from V- to U-shaped cross-sections, with intensive river erosion also shaping the landscape (source: Britannica).

Electricity and Power Sources: The ger camp has limited electricity, provided by a generator (220 V) from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Plug type is commonly type E, but some newer buildings may use

both type G and type E. For details, please refer to <https://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/>

Photography: Photography opportunities are excellent. While observing animals, photographers can take advantage of the often ideal lighting conditions.

Health: This tour involves minimal strenuous walking or hiking, with trekking limited to short day walks to maximize wildlife sightings rather than cover long distances. Some areas are steep and at high altitude, requiring a moderate level of fitness. Altitude averages between 1,500 and 3,200 meters above sea level, though altitude issues are generally minimal. Our team, experienced in mountainous terrain, prioritizes safety and comfort. Those in good health and reasonable fitness should acclimate within a few days and enjoy the journey fully. Horse riding may be possible.

Essential Equipment: A warm down jacket, rain- and windproof jacket and pants, long underwear, hiking boots, wool hat, gloves, sunglasses, sunscreen, and lip balm (SPF 15-30, necessary at altitude), warm socks (dry socks are essential with limited washing opportunities), snacks or energy foods, lozenges, flashlight, hiking poles, towel, and winter sleeping bag. Outer layers should be

muted in color to avoid startling wildlife.

Visa: Most nationalities require a visa to enter Mongolia. Miksture will keep you updated on the process before departure.

While we will strive to adhere to the itinerary, flexibility may be needed due to unforeseen circumstances.

Participants should be prepared for the challenges and unique experiences associated with travel in remote and culturally distinct regions.



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