

# Mongolian Travels: Shamans, Ceremonies and My Spiritual Connection by Gail Hayssen Levitt

November 25th, 2007



Mongolia will always remain in my heart as one of the most amazing, spiritual experiences of my life. The journey began when writer and editor Batbayar Gantsetseg invited me to speak at a shamanic conference there in July 2006. The venue was 13 kilometers outside of the capital city of Ulaanbaatar in the Chingelte Mountain Zalut.

During the conference, we heard Tuva throat singing, saw contortionists, had tasty meals and a large fire ceremony built by the Bruyiat Shamans. The conference was held during the 800th year anniversary of Chinggis (Genghis)

Khaan and The Great Mongolian Empire which gave me a chance to witness a reenactment of a 13th century battle of Chinggis Khaan performed by the Mongolian Cavalry.

In my three-week stay there, I traveled all over Mongolia from Ulaan Bataar to Lake Khovsgol area to the magnificent Gobi Desert.

We flew to northern Mongolia to attend the Nadaam Festival held every year in July all over the country. Every town celebrates with ceremonies and competitions in horseback riding, wrestling, archery and other activities reflecting the times of Chingghis Khaan. We drove in Russian vans over hill and dale through rushing rocky river waters until we reached Lake Khovsgol.

This is the deepest lake in central Asia, the world's 14th largest crystal clear, clean fresh water source spanning 1,065 square miles. At the four-star Alastar ger camp there, we ate delicious fresh yak yogurt topped with local berries, ate yak butter and yak cheese and sipped fabulous Mongolian Vodka.

We then headed to the city of Khara-Korum, the capital of the Mongolian empire in the 13th century and site of the Erdene Zuu monastery built in 1586. The architectural style of the temples is a mix of ancient Mongolian Tibetan and Chinese architecture without a single nail used in the construction.

With Batbayar and his family and translator Norbu, I traveled to the Gobi desert in southwestern Mongolia where I photographed camels, falcons, lizards, birds and some beautiful flowers thriving there. It's been said the Gobi Desert and the mountains surrounding the temples there are the spiritual center of the earth.

By now, I was more accustomed to travel in Mongolia — maps indicating major but non-existent roads, a near total lack of road signs or other indicators in any language and travel that solely depends on the help and generosity of nomads and locals. Depending if you got good directions for a long trip to Gobi, your travel time can easily double. But no one minds.

As Norbu's son put it, "In Mongolia people don't think of time."

Returning to the US, I longed for that vastness - open spaces and the spiritual connection I feel with these Mongolian people.

When I returned I realized the degree to which the whole world was remembering Chinggis Khaan and celebrating Mongolia's 800th anniversary.

A New York Times article in the travel section described it this way: "There are few countries in the world where it is easy to get lost, to be completely drawn away from civilization as Mongolia. [It] remains as one of the worlds least populated countries with many of its people still leading nomadic lives."

In Mongolia, and I see nothing but sky and land, I see part of myself, and my spirit and soul are nurtured and fed deeply.

I didn't feel like a visitor or a tourist.

I felt like I was home.



Shamanic Conference



13th Century Battle



Nadaam Festival



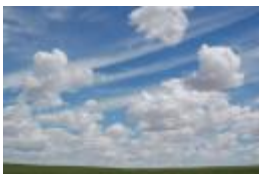
Lake Khovsgol



Alastar Ger Camp



Erdene Zuu Monastery



Gobi Desert