

Tsaatan Community & Visitors' Center (TCVC)

Handbook for Visitors

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July 2008



TSAATAN COMMUNITY & VISITORS CENTER
ЦААЧУН ТӨВ

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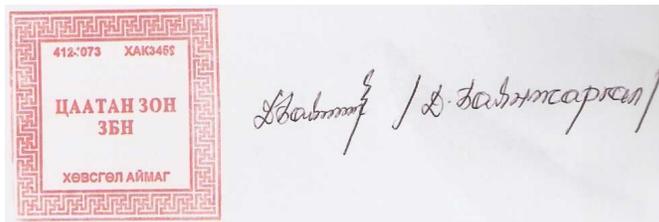
I. Introduction

A welcome from the community

Dear TCVC Visitor,

Greetings to all guests of the Tsaatan Community and Visitors' Center (TCVC)! The TCVC was established by the Tsaatan community with support from The Itgel Foundation NGO, and is the Tsaatan's preferred avenue for hosting all visitors to our community. By traveling through the TCVC you will experience our ancient nomadic lifestyle, understand how our culture has survived through the years, and enjoy the pure and beautiful nature of the taiga. You will also bring critical benefits to our community by supporting the TCVC. I hope that your trip is full of pleasant surprises and adventures, and that you create unforgettable memories on your journey. May your travels be filled with wonder and joy!

Thank you for visiting the TCVC!



Bayanjargal
TCVC Manager

About this handbook

By visiting the Tsaatan people through the TCVC, you are supporting economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable travel that honors the Tsaatan's unique way of life and supports the sustainability of their community. Congratulations for taking the first step towards a truly remarkable trip that promises to bolster local economic and social conditions and ensure a sustainable ecosystem and reindeer herd health.

This handbook has been created as an all-inclusive reference guide and souvenir for your trip through the Tsaatan Community and Visitors' Center. Although this handbook may contain information you have already read or already know, you are **STRONGLY URGED** to review the material before you begin your trip. Good preparation for your trip will not only ensure your own safety and comfort, but also ensure that your trip avoids negative impacts on the community or their environment, and instead supports the goals and values of the Tsaatan people and the TCVC.

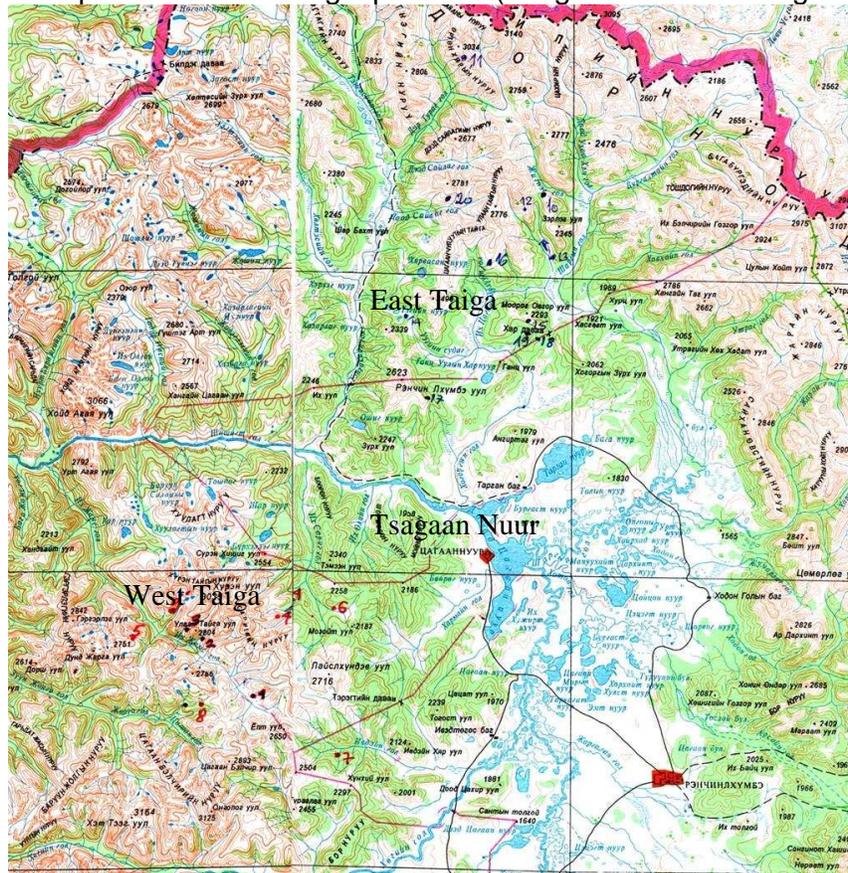
Feedback from visitors like you is very helpful! If you feel this handbook is missing any information, or if you have comments on its usefulness or content, please let us know. The Itgel Foundation NGO continues to work with the Tsaatan on developing English language printed materials and information. Please contact Itgel with your suggestions or feedback via e mail at itgelfoundation@yahoo.com.

Thank you!

II. Maps



Above: Map of Mongolia with boxed area represented in map below.
Below: Map of northern Hovsgol province (Tsagaan Nuur and taiga areas.)



III. Information about the TCVC

Project summary

The Tsaatan Community and Visitors' Center (TCVC) project was initiated jointly by Mongolia's Tsaatan reindeer-herding community and The Itgel Foundation NGO as a remedy for the problems of 1) The lack of sustainable income sources for the remote, nomadic Tsaatan herders, and 2) An increasing trend of irresponsible and exploitative visits to the community. Before the project it was common for tourists to spend \$10,000 USD or more to visit the "Reindeer People," while herders saw virtually none of this revenue. Instead, they have struggled with poverty, isolation, and social marginalization. Aware of the potential risks and benefits of tourism, the Tsaatan began to craft a new vision of visitation and tourism that would be culturally and environmentally sensitive, economically beneficial, and which would serve the development goals of the community (i.e. improved access to health, education, information). The community approached The Itgel Foundation, an NGO with years of experience working with the Tsaatan, to be the implementing partner for their vision. The project's fully volunteer team worked to ensure that Tsaatan individuals were the central planners, stakeholders, and decision-makers at every phase. Capacity building such as guide, cook, and first-aid training, financial planning workshops, and community-wide meetings prepared the Tsaatan to assume 100% autonomous ownership and operational control of the TCVC, a milestone reached in May 2008.

The project called for the establishment of a centralized facility, the TCVC, in the Tsaatan's home village of Tsagaan Nuur, Hovsgol province. The Center, completed in fall 2007, serves as a hub for outfitting trips headed to the Tsaatan community, a communications link that connects remote herders via two-way radio, a space for livelihood skill-building workshops, and a forum for educating visitors about the Tsaatan and their environment. The TCVC provides Tsaatan herders with sustainable economic opportunities through employment related to community-based tourism. By enabling herders to earn greatly-needed income by serving as guides, cooks, and hosts to visitors, the community is empowered both economically and socially. The Center further empowers the community through the fact that it is a shared business and social enterprise, 100% owned and operated by the Tsaatan themselves, giving the community a voice in the public forum, and a truly self-sufficient resource.

Revenue is generated when guests book trips to visit the Tsaatan through the TCVC and pay for guides, cooks, horses, meal service, and accommodations. Funds are directed in part to individual Tsaatan service providers and in part to a Tsaatan Community Fund, which serves as a critical monetary resource for community-wide projects, loans, scholarships, etc. Some TCVC revenue is reinvested in the Center for activities such as operational maintenance, hosting educational programs, or expanding the two-way radio communications network. 100% of revenue generated by the TCVC goes to the Tsaatan community. No other parties earn money through the TCVC, and revenue is *independently controlled* by the TCVC's Tsaatan management board.

The activities of the TCVC benefit not only those directly employed through the Center by providing salaries for service providers, but the community as a whole through the Tsaatan Community Fund. The TCVC provides otherwise unavailable opportunities for herders to earn income at a level significant enough to bolster incomes above the poverty line, and for families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The project has improved access to vital human services such as health care, education, and participation in civil society (elections, etc.) by serving as a hub for remote communications that allow nomadic herders to call for medical help and stay up-to-date on government and school information. When surveyed, 99% of Tsaatan respondents reported that the TCVC has improved conditions in their

community noticeably. As of summer 2008, 80% of single-heads-of-household women in the community had been employed through the TCVC, often earning more in four days of work than in a whole year prior to the TCVC's establishment. Each and every Tsaatan household is directly involved in the TCVC project, either as a service provider, manager, workshop participant, or Community Fund beneficiary.

The project's comprehensive management and operational systems have created vital mechanisms for community-wide decision-making, and have empowered interactions with the public. For example, the TCVC is owned by a legally-registered Tsaatan community association, *Tsaatan Zon Nohorlol*, which serves as a key entity for engaging in local political processes and representing the community on a formal basis. The project benefits the environment by providing livelihood opportunities that are compatible with and reinforce the Tsaatan's tradition of sustainable reindeer husbandry, which promotes the conservation of pasture resources. Furthermore, the project provides economic alternatives to illegal hunting and fishing, thereby protecting the biodiversity of the Tsaatan's home taiga ecosystem. Operational systems such as rotating rosters of guides and cooks allow for economic benefits to be fair and widespread among community members, and reduce the threat of intra-community competition for scarce employment opportunities.

According to herder testimonials, the TCVC has redefined the future of the Tsaatan community. It has significantly strengthened the community economically, socially, politically, and culturally. It has brought the community from a place of uncertainty to a place of hope and confidence. Furthermore, the project is compatible with, and reinforces, traditional values of resource sharing, conservation, and nomadic reindeer husbandry, while embracing the ideals of entrepreneurship and development. The TCVC not only serves as the exclusive source of income for most families, and a key mechanism for engaging with the world, it has also become a symbol of the Tsaatan's hope in their future.

Goods and services offered by the TCVC

Entering the TCVC is free and encouraged. You can gain access to cultural information, updates on routes and weather conditions, and much more, at no charge. 100% of revenue from fee-based services goes to the Tsaatan community.

TCVC services include:

- **Guides** Your guide(s) will be Tsaatan herders with expert knowledge of Tsaatan culture and the taiga landscape.
- **Riding Horses** The only way to reach Tsaatan camps is by horseback. Horses are native to the rugged taiga terrain, are well-trained, and have comfortable saddles.
- **Packhorses** Packhorses carry all your gear and food. Approx. 1 packhorse is needed for every two travelers.
- **Accommodations** Includes a combination of lodging at the TCVC and in Tsaatan teepees.
- **Cooks** Hiring a cook brings income to the community, in particular women, single parent households, and elderly who cannot serve as guides. Cooking on your own can be time-consuming and it is difficult to access cooking materials, wood, and water. Hiring a cook is highly recommended.
- **Meal Kits** Includes all ingredients necessary for your cook to prepare delicious meals. There are no stores or food supplies available outside of Tsagaan Nuur.

- Handicrafts The sale of handicrafts is a vital source of income for remote herders, including children and elders who are unable to participate as TCVC cooks or guides.
- Guided nature exploration, fishing & other activities are also available upon request.

Supporting the TCVC and the Tsaatan community

By making the choice to visit the Tsaatan community through the TCVC, you have already made the most economically, environmentally, and socially responsible decision possible for your trip. The TCVC is the *only* Tsaatan endorsed and approved method of visiting their community. As a TCVC guest you will be welcomed with appreciation. Because the Tsaatan request that all visitors to the taiga coordinate their efforts through the TCVC, visitors are asked to share the news of this project with tour operators and friends. Advise fellow travelers to ensure that their trip is coordinated through the TCVC. You can also support the community by purchasing handicrafts or by making a donation to the Tsaatan Community Fund at the TCVC.

IV. FAQ'S

Why should I organize my visit to the Tsaatan through the TCVC?

Visitation to the Tsaatan organized by individuals and companies outside the community, or carried out by independent travelers with privately contracted guides, leaves the Tsaatan largely out of the loop of tourism. That said, some tour operators have made great efforts to collaborate with the Tsaatan to share the benefits of tourism. The center works best in tandem with other tour industry professionals. When you incorporate the TCVC in your travel plans, you help encourage this interplay by enabling the Tsaatan to have an increasingly participatory role in your visit, earn benefits such as revenue from trips, and establish standardized norms and guidelines for visiting their unique community and ecosystem. Utilizing the TCVC is a great way to show the Tsaatan the respect and support they have requested when visiting their community.

Why is the TCVC not closer to Lake Hovsgol? Isn't that where the Tsaatan live?

The Tsaatan do NOT traditionally live near Lake Hovsgol. In recent years, a very small number of Tsaatan families have chosen to move to the Lake in order to harness revenue from tourist flow in the area, despite the fact that the Lake Hovsgol region offers very little, if any, forage for reindeer. Bringing reindeer to the area often results in disease, malnutrition, and even death of animals. The recent trend of heading south to the Lake has also catalyzed rifts in the Tsaatan community. For example, herders that stay in the taiga feel that Tsaatan presence at the Lake objectifies their culture, jeopardizes the health of their primary resource (their reindeer), and disrupts traditions and patterns central to the Tsaatan lifestyle. Families that do choose to go to the Lake earn small amounts of cash from tourists by posing for portraits or conducting shamanic rituals, a result of little access to alternative income sources, and dire economic situations. This tough decision ultimately threatens the very survival of the Tsaatan and their reindeer. When asked, Tsaatan herders consistently say they would rather host visitors in their home region, the taiga, where their reindeer are healthy and their lifestyle can be sustained. By visiting Tsaatan families at the Lake you are helping to perpetuate a dangerous cycle that may spell out the end of this unique culture. Please be an informed traveler, and do your part to promote sensitive tourism in Mongolia. You can do this by showing the Tsaatan that you are willing to make the effort to support their community by going further north to the TCVC, rather than seeing "The Reindeer People" at Lake Hovsgol.

Is an in-depth, authentic experience possible if I make plans through the TCVC?

Making plans through the TCVC is the BEST way to ensure that you have an enriching, authentic experience, since the TCVC allows you to directly connect with members of the community. Your guide will be a Tsaatan herder who knows the taiga intimately, and can help you make arrangements to stay with host families, take part in daily life, and understand the culture and environment of the community. The TCVC can also help make sure that you do not break specific taboos, stay too long or in the wrong place, or do things that may be harmful to the community. By avoiding these things, you will have a more positive visit, and walk away with a greater understanding of Tsaatan life.

Can I just show-up at the TCVC? Will someone be there to help me?

A host family lives adjacent to and watches over the TCVC who may be available when you arrive. They can open the TCVC for you and help you make arrangements. Please remember that services take time to coordinate and it may take several days before you are able to travel into the taiga. Not only does food need to be prepared, but horses, guides, and cooks must be coordinated and travel from the taiga to pick you up. "Walk-Ins" are very difficult to accommodate, so it is strongly advised to make reservations ahead of time (at least 4 days.)

I have visited the Tsaatan before. Should I return on my own or include the TCVC in my plans?

Even if you have visited the taiga numerous times, it is always a good idea to include the TCVC in your travel plans. If you have not used Tsaatan guides or horses in the past, using the TCVC helps you do so, ensuring that your visit closely involves the people you are going to see. If you have personal contacts in the community, it is likely they are a TCVC guide or cook, and they may be able to be assigned to your trip upon special request.

Will it cost me more to incorporate the TCVC in my travel plans?

The TCVC offers services that are competitively priced, such as daily rates for horse rentals, guides, cooks, and accommodations. You may find that TCVC rates are actually significantly cheaper than rates quoted elsewhere, as the Tsaatan are the direct service providers and have virtually no overhead associated with their Center. Every dollar you direct towards the TCVC deeply benefits the Tsaatan, whose average household income can be as low as \$100 per year, well below Mongolia's poverty line.

I want to conduct research or produce a film, photo exhibition, or other media about the Tsaatan. How can the TCVC fit in with my plans?

If you are hoping to conduct any kind of commercial, academic, or media-related activity involving the Tsaatan, it is particularly important that you incorporate the TCVC in your plans. The Tsaatan have encountered many filmmakers, photographers, authors, journalists, biologists, and anthropologists, and are savvy to the concept that many of these visits are designed to produce products that yield profits, publications, or public material of some kind. Some Tsaatan welcome participation in these kinds of projects while others are not interested. Most herders feel, understandably, that compensation is appropriate if the end-result is a profit-generating product. The TCVC can help ensure that your project takes these factors into consideration, resulting in sensitivity towards the community and a greater chance of success of your project. Please remember that Mongolian regulations require filmmakers and professional photographers to sign contracts in advance of production with the Tsaatan community. Contact the TCVC well ahead of when you plan to visit the taiga so that a contract can be created with the TCVC.

V. Orientation and Logistics

Where is the TCVC?

The TCVC is located in the northernmost village, Tsagaan Nuur, of Mongolia's northernmost province, Hovsgol. It is centrally located between the areas inhabited by the Tsaatan people. (See "East and West Taigas" below) Travel to and from Tsagaan Nuur and the taiga is difficult and expensive. TCVC service starts and ends in Tsagaan Nuur, meaning that you will need to coordinate with or contract a tour operator to arrange your logistics to reach the Center.

Getting There

Depending on how you choose to travel to Tsagaan Nuur, you will fly (2 hours) or drive (20 hours) from UB to Murun. In Murun you must be sure to register at the Border Patrol Office before you continue onwards to Tsagaan Nuur (see "Permit" section). There are virtually no services north of Murun, so be sure to have snacks and water for your drive. Additionally, there is no guarantee that any necessary items (sunscreen, hats, or specialty foods) are available in Tsagaan Nuur, so Murun will be your last opportunity.

From Murun your only option is to drive approximately 12 hours north to Tsagaan Nuur (there are no flights). Drivers can be contracted at the Murun Tourist Information Center. About 4 hours outside of Murun is a small ger compound (Biltis) where you may or may not be able to get food and sleep over for the night. Another 4 hours north is a small town (soum center) called Ulaan Uul that has shops to buy basic snacks and water, but there are no guarantees that they will be open or have what you are looking for. Fuel is available in Ulaan Uul but rarely available north of there. Fuel up and bring filled spare canisters to avoid being stranded. The road from Murun to Tsagaan Nuur will be bumpy. Expect to blow a tire or get stuck in the mud. Dramamine is recommended for nausea and kidney belts for your lower back. Drivers appreciate music tapes or tape adapters for music players. Be patient and expect delays.

At the end of your drive you will reach the soum center of Tsagaan Nuur. The TCVC is located north of the hospital and post office, and faces the lakeshore. It is a two-story brown cabin with a green upper section, blue and white balconies, and a silver roof. There is a gated fence surrounding the TCVC. There is an on-site manager and/or greeter at the TCVC 24 hours a day. Guests should go directly to the TCVC upon arrival in Tsagaan Nuur. Check in with the manager to confirm your trip plans, and for assistance with border registration. Up to ten or more guests at a time can be accommodated for overnight stays at the TCVC. If your TCVC trip includes accommodations in Tsagaan Nuur, this is where you'll be staying.

Tsagaan Nuur

This is one of the most remote *soums* (villages) in Mongolia. There is no electricity or running water. The availability of food and beverages is limited. Typically there is always bottled water, lots of candy, cookies, and juices, but items such as fresh and dried fruit, nuts, and specialty drinks are rarely available. The village is situated right on the shore of a lake. Water from the lake must be boiled or filtered before consumption. The TCVC does not have a filter but water can be boiled for you upon request. There is a public shower house in Tsagaan Nuur. Ask your guide to assist you in making a reservation. There are no guarantees as to the availability of goods that you may need, including towels, hats, sunscreen, bug repellent, and riding boots. Make sure that you have everything you need before you leave Murun.

East and West Taigas

There are two main areas where the Tsaatan community lives: East and West Taigas, respectively. Each of these areas can be accessed by driving or riding away from the TCVC towards the edge of the taiga, and then riding to the actual Tsaatan camps, located in the mountainous taiga ecosystem. Reaching Tsaatan camps can take between 1-12 hours, depending on the location of their nomadic camps, and involves careful logistics that usually include both vehicle(s) and horses. (This is an additional reason to bring extra fuel canisters.)

West (Barone) Taiga is reached via Tsagaan Nuur, heading west towards an area called "Harmae." The edge of the West Taiga is between 20 and 40 km from Tsagaan Nuur, depending on the point of entry. There are more than 25 Tsaatan households that live in the West Taiga. They move often and shift between small and large groups based on seasonal pastures. Much of the terrain in West Taiga is steep and forested.

East (Zuun) Taiga is reached via Tsagaan Nuur or Renchinlumbe. When visiting the East Taiga from Tsagaan Nuur you will need to cross the Shishged River by ferry (people, horses and vehicles permitted), and head towards an area called "Hogrok." The edge of the East Taiga is between 20 and 50 km from Tsagaan Nuur, depending on the point of entry. There are roughly 18 families that live in East Taiga. They move and camp in two groups (13 families and 5 families, respectively). Much of the terrain in East Taiga is open valleys, wetlands, and forests.

Due to the long distances involved in travel, your time in the taiga will likely be limited.

VI. Information about Community and Surroundings

The Tsaatan community

The Tsaatan and Their Reindeer

The Tsaatan are a community of nomadic reindeer herders, originally from Tuva in Siberia, who have historically inhabited the border region of Russia and Mongolia. Ethnically, the community identifies as *Dukha* and *Uighar*, but their lifestyle as reindeer herders earned them the Mongolian name *Tsaatan*, which means roughly "with reindeer." For millennia, the Tsaatan have depended on domesticated reindeer for nearly all of their basic needs, such as milk for food, skins for clothing, and antlers for tools. For meat, the Tsaatan have depended on wild game, while nuts, berries, and flora of the taiga also supplement their traditional diet. Reindeer are also used as both riding and pack animals in the rugged taiga environment the Tsaatan call home. Said to have been domesticated several thousand years ago, reindeer play a central role in the spiritual, socio-economic, and linguistic traditions of the community.

Life in the Taiga

The Tsaatan move, or *nomadize*, between five and ten times per year in accordance with factors such as forage needs of reindeer, weather, and social events such as the start of the school year. Families load their belongings, including the canvas used to construct their teepee dwelling, or *ortz*, on the backs of reindeer, and head for the next camp. Camps may consist of a single family, or as many as thirteen households, which live and move as a group. A typical day in a Tsaatan camp includes milking, herding, hunting, foraging for nuts and berries, cooking, sewing, social activities, and more, depending on the season and needs of the community. Many duties are performed cooperatively, with members of several households working together to complete daily or seasonal tasks. Families rely strongly on

one another, fostering a unique interdependence among all members of the community. Resource sharing is significant between households, but each family owns reindeer and physical items privately.

Spirituality of the Tsaatan

Spiritual traditions of the Tsaatan are powerfully defined by shamanist beliefs. In shamanist traditions, ancestors and natural features are held sacred, and serve as a source of strength or insight for individuals identified as shamans in the community. The Tsaatan rely on shamans for advice and healing, and for communicating with spirits, ancestors, or nature, which occurs through ritual and the calling of spirits, or *ongots*. Each shaman has distinct abilities and characteristics, and may be male or female, old or young. Anthropological and archeological research suggests that the ancient practices of shamanism may have originated among the ancestral communities of the Tsaatan, making their spiritual traditions among the oldest and most enduring in the world.

Creative Expression

Creative traditions of the Tsaatan have been largely influenced by the minimalism and practicality characteristic of a nomadic lifestyle. Artistry is expressed in the design and crafting of practical implements, such as saddles, knives, or clothing, rather than in paintings or sculptures. Musical expressions, the ultimate in portable art, are rich and diverse in the Tsaatan community. Folk songs are sung in both Tuvan and Mongolian, with lyrics focusing on family, nature, herding, and cultural identity. Throat singing, a technical vocal tradition that originated in the Tsaatan's ancestral homeland of Tuva, has also been a part of the community's creative repertoire. While the voice is the primary instrument of music in the community, shamans often use drums, jaw harps, and rattles to call spirits.

The taiga

The Surroundings

Tsaatan families engaged in reindeer husbandry live in two distinct areas known as East and West Taigas. The East Taiga, which is home to roughly eighteen households, lies northeast of Tsagaan Nuur soum center, across the Shishged River, crossable by ferry. The West Taiga, home to around twenty households, lies due west of Tsagaan Nuur, beyond a steppe valley area called Harmae. Vehicles can travel from Tsagaan Nuur towards either taiga, but cannot reach far beyond the steppe-taiga transition, or *ecotone*. Most camps and taiga locations are accessible only by horse. Terrain in the taiga is rugged and varied, with steep mountains, high-alpine passes, mud and wetlands, and dense forests.

A Unique Ecosystem

Highly distinct from the steppe grasslands found in much of Mongolia, the ecosystem that is home to the Tsaatan and their reindeer is classified as *taiga*. Taiga ecosystems are dominated by forested areas, in this case primarily composed of larch trees. Open valleys that resemble polar tundra are also typical in taiga ecosystems. The several thousand square kilometer habitat classified as taiga in the Tsagaan Nuur region forms the northernmost tip of Mongolia and provides home range for the world's southernmost indigenous reindeer population. The specialized nutritional and geographical requirements of reindeer, *Rangifer tarandus*, prevent the species from living outside the taiga naturally, but extensive forage resources in the taiga allow them to thrive. Dozens of species of lichen, along with sedges, grasses, and willow, provide nutrition for reindeer. Berries, mushrooms, pine nuts and a variety of medicinal plants add to the floral biodiversity in the taiga. Fauna includes endangered species such as musk deer, sable, and argali sheep, which are protected under Mongolian law. Brown bears, wolves, elk, moose, and marmots also live in the taiga, along with Ptarmigans, Capercaillie (Wood Grouse), raptors, woodpeckers and other birds.

Sacred Geography

Mineral springs, jagged peaks, and lush valleys are valued by community members for their beauty and resources, but also as features of sacred geography. This perception transforms the physical environment of the taiga into a spiritual landscape deserving of special considerations and practices. Some sacred areas are off limits to visitors, for example places inhabited by dangerous spirits, while other areas may have rules associated with them, such as activities that are required or prohibited. Tsaatan guides and hosts help travelers navigate their sacred homeland, ensuring that visits to the taiga are both environmentally and culturally sensitive.

The Tsaatan's past and present

Historical Perspectives

During Mongolia's socialist era from 1921-91, the Tsaatan underwent significant changes in lifestyle and culture. Many families were relocated to settled areas to work in cooperatives, and reindeer were collectivized in state-owned herds. Infrastructural developments made education and health care more accessible to the remote community, offering improvements in quality of life, but presented the challenge of how to integrate traditional systems of reindeer husbandry with modern life revolving largely around settled areas. Reindeer herd health and numbers fluctuated under socialism as the population faced relocations, periodic slaughters, new infections, but also benefited from stable veterinary care and a supply of supplemental feed. Also during this period the community began to incorporate cultural traditions of the majority ethnic group, as Mongolian language all but replaced their native Tuvan, and previously unavailable consumer goods became staples in daily life.

Transitions

Following Mongolia's revolution in the early 1990s, the Tsaatan, like all Mongolian citizens, were free to lead the lifestyle of their choice. For the Tsaatan, however, this transition presented unique challenges. Reindeer herds that had been reduced in numbers in recent decades were insufficient to meet herders' resource needs. Restrictive hunting laws hindered access to wild game, the Tsaatan's primary protein source. Border closures between the Mongolian and Siberian taiga areas limited pasture availability. Furthermore, the disappearance of government subsidies presented a sudden need for cash to purchase food, obtain medical treatments, and attend school. For herders living in the remote taiga, it became evident that creative and dynamic solutions were needed in order to access education, economic opportunities, and health care in a manner compatible with nomadic reindeer husbandry and the community's distinct cultural values.

The Tsaatan Today

Today, the Tsaatan represent Mongolia's smallest ethnic minority, with approximately 45 households herding reindeer, and a dozen or so more living in towns and cities. Families living in the remote taiga rank among the poorest citizens of the country, but a variety of NGO, government, and private sector efforts designed to promote sustainability and self-sufficiency are yielding positive results. Education, health care, representation in government, and livelihood issues are top priorities for community members who are finding ways to integrate aspects of modern life with ancient culture: Traditional *ortz* equipped with solar-powered satellite dishes and two-way radios create critical lines of communication to settled areas, schools and hospitals without disrupting nomadic movement patterns; reindeer herd numbers are increasing in part due to the application of both traditional remedies and modern medicine; carefully designed community-based tourism initiatives are creating economic opportunities for herders while reinforcing cultural traditions and sustainable resource management.

Visiting the Tsaatan and the taiga

Arrival of Visitors

In recent years, tourism and visits to the taiga by researchers, filmmakers, missionaries, and others have increased rapidly. As more visitors come to the taiga, the Tsaatan have confronted both the impacts and the opportunities associated with this new trend. Visits are exciting for community members, who enjoy meeting new people and exchanging cultural information, but also frustrating, because the Tsaatan are often overlooked in decision-making when it comes to the timing, frequency, and activities of visitors. The Tsaatan believe tourism is an important economic opportunity, but when visits occur with no inclusion of community members themselves, financial benefits are practically zero. In an effort to encourage visits that are sustainable and sensitive, enjoyable for visitors, and which serve the long-term interests of the community, the Tsaatan developed a dynamic concept: establish a Tsaatan-owned and operated center that could serve as a hub for coordinating trips to the area and meet the interests of visitors and the community alike.

The TCVC

In 2005, with support from a nongovernmental organization called The Itgel Foundation, community members began a planning phase to establish the *Tsaatan Community & Visitors' Center (TCVC)* or *Tsaachin Tuv (Reindeer Herder's Center* in Mongolian). Through community-wide meetings and surveys, the Tsaatan developed a plan to construct a facility in Tsagaan Nuur soum that would offer goods and services to visitors, provide greatly needed income-generating opportunities to community members, and serve as a hub for educational workshops and communications. In 2006 a temporary space for the TCVC, donated by a Tsaatan herder, was opened in Tsagaan Nuur. In summer 2007, the new center was completed and opened its doors for the first TCVC-organized trips, training workshops for community members, and access point for two-way radio communications. The current building marks a new era opening doors both literal and metaphorical between the Tsaatan community and the world.

Community Owned and Operated

The TCVC is 100% owned and operated by the Tsaatan, and features unique systems that ensure maximum benefits for all members of the community and for visitors like you. Rotating rosters of Tsaatan service providers allow visitors to hire professionally trained guides and cooks, while giving all members of the community a predictable and fair opportunity to earn income rather than compete with one another. TCVC service offerings include horse rental, meal kits, accommodations, travel advice, research/project support, and more. 100% of revenue generated by the TCVC is carefully managed through transparent accounting practices, and is divided between individual service providers and a shared *Community Fund*. The Community Fund serves as a vital monetary resource for the Tsaatan's long-term future, and is overseen by an elected board of Tsaatan managers with input from the community as a whole. Donations are always welcome to the Community Fund, and are used for diverse initiatives such as scholarships, emergency loans to families in need, hiring of doctors to make taiga house calls, and environmental conservation efforts. If you would like to donate to the Tsaatan Community Fund please speak with a TCVC representative.

As the only Tsaatan-operated hub pertaining to visitation to their community, the Tsaatan request that *all* visits to the taiga be coordinated through the TCVC. The TCVC was designed to serve tour operator-organized trips and independent travelers, as well as researchers and professional visitors. Coordinating trips through the TCVC ensures that Tsaatan individuals will have an active role in your visit, thereby providing the most authentic and culturally sensitive experience possible. Furthermore, by utilizing TCVC goods and

services, you will offer critically needed income opportunities to the Tsaatan people, and you will be supporting the sustainability of their community.

Leave No Trace

A complete list of leave-no-trace recommendations is available at the TCVC. Here are just a few items to remember:

- Stay on designated trails as much as possible, and camp only in designated areas
- Do not pick any plants or cut living trees (Use only fallen trees for firewood)
- Do not pollute waterways with soap, dirty dish water/clothing, or food scraps
- Do not fish or hunt without a permit
- Extinguish all camp fires thoroughly and never throw cigarettes on the ground
- Don't litter or leave trash behind. Pack out all waste and dispose of properly
- Do not bring exotic plants or animals into the taiga
- Do not remove stones, minerals, fossils, or other natural items from the taiga
- Always ask the location of appropriate areas for hygiene activities and "personal business" (Away from waterways, sacred areas, and living/herding areas)

VII. Preparing for your Trip

Finding a translator

You are **STRONGLY URGED** to take a translator if you do not have a strong knowledge of Mongolian. Your Tsaatan guide only speaks Mongolian. There are no English speakers in or around the taiga. Relying on phrasebooks puts an inappropriate burden on your hosts to struggle to understand you. You are traveling to a distant and special part of the world. Make the effort and incur the expense to ensure you can truly communicate. This is a matter of courtesy and of safety. Translators can be hired in UB or Murun. Check the TCVC website for possible information about available translators. It is best to have a translator who has experience in the taiga, is comfortable in rugged conditions, and is sensitive to and interested in the Tsaatan's unique culture.

Obtaining a border permit

It is absolutely vital (and required by law) that you have a border permit when traveling in the Tsagaan Nuur area and visiting the taiga, as these areas are situated on the Mongolian-Russian border. Border permit inspections happen regularly, sometimes up to five times a day, so do not expect to slip by without one. **Be sure that your documents, including passport and border permit, are easily accessible and on your person at all times during your trip.** By the time you arrive at the TCVC you should already have your permit. If you do not have a permit, unfortunately you must return to Murun or you will face heavy fines and possible arrest or deportation. **Permits cannot be obtained at the TCVC.** To obtain a permit, you must apply in person at the Mongolian Border Protection Authority either in Ulaanbaatar or Murun. **You will need photocopies of all travelers' passports (including Mongolian nationals) and visas, a request letter (from a tour company, NGO, embassy, or other organization), and a map of where you intend to travel.** Permits can be issued during business hours on weekdays and may require between three hours and three days for processing. **Even with this permit, you must still check-in with the Border Post in Murun AND Tsagaan Nuur to register your trip with the local authorities.** Border permits are free. If you are asked to pay fees at any step in the process, alert the authorities. However, if you do not have a valid permit, you will be fined. Fines can be enormous and are not worth the risk.

Packing list for the taiga

Be prepared for extreme weather. It may be 80 degrees F or it may be snowing, all within a few hours. Layers, lightweight, and compact are critical. Please contact your tour operator or trip coordinator to see what supplies they do or do not provide or for any additional packing suggestions they may have. Remember to ALWAYS carry the prescription for RX drugs with you, information about serious allergies, and evacuation instructions.

- Passport, passport photos, visas, emergency contacts, insurance card, etc.
- Sleeping bag (rated to around 0 degrees F)
- Ground pad/sleeping mat
- Tent (optional, but should be compact)
- Smallish duffle or backpack and/or a daypack
- Money pouch or money belt for keeping passport and money on you at all times
- Very warm jacket (down jacket that stuffs into a small sack is best)
- Full raingear (jacket, pants, hat/hood)
- Long underwear (not cotton) and other layers such as fleece
- Warm socks (wool or Smart Wool are great)
- Clothing that can be layered. Natural fibers such as wool and silk are recommended
- Full length pants for riding
- Deel (traditional Mongolian clothing). Useful but not required
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Pocket knife
- Sunglasses with strap or cord
- Sun hat with chin strap (strapless hats blow off when you ride)
- Water bottle with clip, string, or carabiner (to clip onto your saddle)
- Water pump, filtration device, or iodine tablets
- Winter hat, gloves, scarf
- Flashlight (head lamp recommended)
- Electronics: The last place you will be able to charge batteries is in Murun
- Personal medical supplies and toiletries (see below)
- Riding boots or chaps - Note: calf height boots or chaps are best to prevent bruising on Mongolian stirrup straps. Boots should have a narrow sole to prevent foot from being stuck in stirrups, and smooth or minor ridges (treads) on bottom of boot so foot does not get stuck in stirrup if you fall. You should not wear gym shoes, sandals, or heavily treaded boots. You can buy riding boots in UB or Murun, but you probably won't find any in Tsagaan Nuur. The biggest concern about boots is that they are not waterproof. If it is raining or you are trekking through rivers, expect your feet to get wet. Prepare for this by treating boots or lining boots with plastic bags.

Personal medical kit

- General antibiotic (Cipro or other) good for sinus infections, traveler's diarrhea, etc.
- Dramamine or other motion sickness medicine
- Advil/aspirin/etc.
- Antihistamine (and medicine like epinephrine if you have severe allergies)
- Cold and sinus medicine
- Anti-diarrhea medicine AND anti-constipation medicine (You'll need both!)

VIII. During your Trip

In recent years, visits to the taiga have increased rapidly. Most Tsaatan families enjoy welcoming visitors, as it allows them the opportunity to interact with interesting people and learn about new places. However, it is important to remember that the taiga is not a tourist camp, but rather the home of an active, thriving community that wishes to sustain their way of life within a sensitive ecosystem. If your expectation is to be entertained or to have luxurious accommodations, the taiga is not the place for you. But if your expectation is to visit a community in a respectful manner in order to learn about a unique culture and pristine natural environment, you've come to the right place. WELCOME!

The Tsaatan are an incredibly hospitable people. Upon arrival you will be welcomed into families' homes as a guest and invited to experience a variety of aspects of taiga life. Being a good guest does not just mean accepting hospitality offered to you, but being aware of how you impact the community. While there are certain guidelines that apply to the community as a whole, individual families may have different expectations for visitors. Please listen and be respectful of their wishes, communicate through your translator and TCVC guides regularly, and ask questions. Remember, you are a guest in their home. Furthermore, based on the season, weather, and activities of the community at the time of a visit, expectations and guidelines may differ. The following is a list of things to be aware of and can serve as an aid to converse with the herders.

Things to remember

Water:

Do not wash dishes, clothes, or your body in open waterways such as streams and lakes. Instead, extract water using a bucket or cup and take it to an appropriate location for washing.

Food:

As with any Mongolian community, the Tsaatan will offer tea, bread, and dairy products when you enter a home. As a guest, it is rude to refuse food and drink that is offered to you. Even if you do not want to eat what you are offered, you should still take a small amount and sip or nibble. You are not required to eat everything but it is polite to accept what is offered to you.

Handling Reindeer:

Calves are not to be handled. Although they are hard to resist, handling young reindeer can introduce and spread disease, reduce immune function, and increase stress levels; all of which can be fatal. The same is true to a lesser extent for adult reindeer. Any handling of reindeer should be done only with express permission from individual owners and with the guidance of community members.

Riding and milking reindeer:

These activities can spread infection and stress animals. Visitors should not pressure community members to authorize behavior that is not safe for their herd. Always ask herders before handling any animals. If a herder allows you to handle their animals, be sure to follow instructions exactly. Visitors over 180 lbs (82 kg) should not ride reindeer, as they may injure the backs of the animal. Visitors who are sick or who have cuts or sores on hands should never milk reindeer.

Calving/Breeding seasons:

Two of the most important and sensitive times of year in the taiga are calving and breeding seasons. Calving takes place between late April and mid summer. Visitors are strongly urged to refrain from walking through areas where reindeer are tied or sleeping, and to avoid touching or petting reindeer, in particular newborn calves. Your Tsaatan guide can provide

information about areas to avoid and suggestions for keeping a safe, low stress environment for calves and calving females. Breeding season (called *rut*) occurs between late August and early October. Bull reindeer can be more aggressive during this time and should be avoided. Breeding should not be disrupted and visitors should avoid excessive handling during this important period.

Other animals:

Dogs and horses can be dangerous and should not be approached unless your guide or a community member gives you express permission. Dogs can carry rabies and parasites or may bite. Horses can have ticks or lice or may kick if startled. Wild animals should never be approached or fed. Permits are needed for all hunting and fishing.

Teepee Etiquette:

Always enter an ortz by lifting the door flap on the right side. When you enter, walk to the left, moving objects out of the way rather than stepping over them. Do not cross the mid-point of the ortz. The left half is for guests and the right half is for family. You should not sit with your legs out in front of you in an ortz, as it is disrespectful to point your feet at other people, the stove, or sacred objects. It is best to tuck legs under you (Indian style) or to the side, even if your knees are sore after a long ride. Exit an ortz on the same side that you came in, lifting the door flap on your left hand side.

Chores:

Many visitors want to get involved in daily life by helping with chores around camp. It is certainly not expected that you help out, but if you choose to get involved there are some things to remember. If a herder is busy with a chore such as chopping wood or fetching water, it is best to observe first, evaluate if you are able to be of use, and then offer to help by actively stepping in. As a guest, a verbal offer to help will rarely be accepted. PLEASE remember that some chores can be dangerous and the taiga is not the place to experiment with a new skill or activity. Chopping wood, herding, packing horses and building teepees are better left to the locals so as to avoid accidents or mistakes. Offers to learn a skill are appreciated, so long as you are willing to be patient and have a sense of humor.

Religion/Spirituality:

The Tsaatan have sacred places in which you may or may not be allowed to wander. Talk to your TCVC guide to learn more about the areas which may be off limits or which may have rules about restricted behaviors. When you arrive in a new place, please make an effort to learn about your surroundings by talking to your guide. Please respect the Tsaatan's spiritual traditions by treating sacred objects or places with reverence.

Picking plants, berries, nuts:

Pine nuts, wild berries, mushrooms, and edible/medicinal plants are abundant in the taiga, particularly in autumn. Your guide can take you out on a walk looking for these items. Please do not take more than you need, but instead just sample some of the natural goodies. Commercial harvesting is not permitted.

Interacting with the community:

The Tsaatan are hospitable and friendly. They are used to many different types of visitors. Asking questions is perfectly acceptable and is a good way to learn about their culture. If you make a mistake or accidentally break a cultural guideline, it is okay. The community will appreciate your best efforts to respect their traditions. Joking and teasing are common in Tsaatan culture. It is culturally acceptable to tease and joke back. However, visitors should respect the boundaries of touching or teasing others, in particular members of the opposite sex. Hand shaking is more common between men. A polite nod is a perfectly acceptable way to greet someone. Hugging is not generally part of Tsaatan culture.

Cultural do's and don'ts

<i>General Etiquette</i>	
<i>Do</i>	<i>Do Not</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover your head & wrists when presenting gifts/money • Pass and accept things with right hand and palms up • Accept food or drink that is offered to you • Try to speak Mongolian if you can • Address elders/authorities with “Ta” not “Chee” • Use an open palm to indicate objects or directions • Try to sing when asked (ability doesn't matter!) • Flick alcohol in traditional manner when appropriate • Shake the hands of someone who you have accidentally bumped feet with • Establish the proper area for going to the bathroom or washing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass or accept anything with left hand • Point with your finger • Talk or joke about bad things that may happen • Point your feet at someone or show your soles • Touch a man's upper body or head without permission • Whistle indoors • Let blood touch the ground • Wash dirty dishes/clothes directly in a body of water • Compliment a child with strongly positive words • Say thank you too much or for small gestures • Say you will do something you don't intend to do • Place a hat or other “open” object face up
<i>Guidelines For Visiting a Family</i>	
<i>Do</i>	<i>Do Not</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask before taking pictures and introduce yourself first • Proceed to the left as you enter an ortz • Offer to help by DOING not just by ASKING • Keep belongings neatly organized and in proper area • Offer a gift if appropriate • Grow accustomed to sitting in silence and just observing • Mail pictures to people if you say you will • Open an ortz door from the outside on the right side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step over food or objects on the ground • Talk in a foreign language excessively in front of others • Point the spout of a tea pot at someone or at the door • Put anything in a family's stove without asking • Pull on or hang anything on ortz poles without permission • Block the sacred area in a family's home • Refuse to try food or tea • Throw objects, especially inside • Pass the “midpoint” of an ortz without permission

What to expect

The taiga is rugged and remote. You will probably be physically challenged, and required to step outside your circle of comfort. Special accommodations can rarely be made in the taiga. Travelers should come with the expectation of adapting to local rhythms and cultural nuances. Visitors are urged to bring a translator to aid in communication as a matter of safety and respect.

Riding:

Saddles will be soft, Russian style saddles. Riding will be in open and wooded terrain, almost entirely at a walking pace. If you want to go faster, ask your guide, if not, you don't have to. Rides can be anywhere from 1-12 hours depending on the location of the camps as well as the pace of the group. Your guides will keep an extremely close watch on you and if

there is ever a problem, they may ask you to stop. Your guides will give mounting, riding and horse handling instructions before your trek. Even if you are an experienced rider, Mongolian horses, equipment, and riding style are different so it is important to pay attention. Expect to be sore and challenged.

<i>Guidelines for Dealing with Horses</i>	
<i>Do</i>	<i>Do Not</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount a horse only from its left • Say “choo” for go, pull back on reins to stop • Follow the path and pace of the guide • Lean forward when going uphill; lean backwards when going downhill • Keep your heels pointed down in stirrups • Keep track of things tied to you and your saddle • Avoid mud and ice! • Use firm gestures and signals to control your horse • Monitor the position of your saddle and girth straps. Alert your guide if your girth strap is loose or if your saddle is slipping • Slow down when approaching a group of horses • Allow the guide to tie and pack horses • Stop your horse and dismount in difficult terrain • To stop a runaway horse, pull one side of your reins as hard as you can, forcing horse to make a circle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change clothes or adjust luggage while riding a horse • Take photos while riding • Put more than the balls of your feet in the stirrup • Go on a path or at a pace ahead of guide • Shout or make abrupt movements around horses • Stand behind or on the right side of a horse • Approach at a fast pace to a group of horses • Start to go while others are mounting stopped horses • Adjust saddles or pack horses without guide’s permission • Grab saddle when mounting and dismounting, it will slide off

Food:

Food resources are scarce in the remote taiga and families should never be relied on to feed your group. Community members ask that visitors bring their own food, or better yet, arrange to have meal and cook service provided through the TCVC. This gives women employment opportunities and ensures that you will be well fed in the taiga. If you have purchased meal kits you will be provided with bread, jam, coffee and/or tea for breakfast and served a delicious lunch and dinner prepared by a TCVC certified cook who has been trained by Mongolia’s College of Food Technology. Meals can take a long time to prepare, so be sure to communicate with your cook about preferred eating times. Accommodations cannot be made for those with special dietary needs. Visitors are encouraged to bring specialty snacks or food items. If you do so, it is polite to share with your guides and hosts. Sweets should be given to adults and not just children, but of course in moderation.

Accommodations:

In the taiga, you will be sleeping in an orts (teepee) or in your own tent. Ortzs have stoves, but it gets cold at night, so be sure you are prepared for this temperature change when readying yourself for bed. There are no snakes, rodents, and virtually no bugs to worry about. The community understands that some visitors want to stay in tents, while others want to stay in teepees. It is up to you where to spend the night. The community may have an extra teepee or “orts hotel” set up in camp. Staying in the orts hotel brings revenue to the community and helps ensure that you have your own space to be comfortable. Ortz hotel fees are paid to the TCVC at the end of your trip, with income shared amongst families in the community. Pitching tents is also acceptable. Please ask your guide where an appropriate place is to set up a tent (i.e. away from sacred areas, waterways, and areas where animals

are kept). All visitors must come prepared with a sleeping mat and sleeping bag. If you are traveling through a tour operator, check with the company to see what items are provided and what items you are required to bring.

Luggage:

You do not need, nor is it possible, to transport a lot of luggage to the taiga. It is recommended that you pack the essentials into a small backpack that can be worn on your body during the horse trek, and other items in a soft duffel that can be tied onto a packhorse. If you wish to carry a lot of gear, you may need to rent additional packhorses. There is a locking storage closet at the TCVC to store items and valuables that you would like to leave behind during your trip.

Weather:

The weather in the taiga can change from hot and sunny to snowing within a few hours or single horse ride. Be prepared with layers for heat, snow, and rain. If you aren't prepared, you will likely be wet or cold.

Winter: Very cold, lots of snow. Temps drop as low as -67 F/-55 C. Visitors must have expedition-grade sleeping bags and clothing. Road conditions are dependent on snow and ice conditions.

Spring: Highly variable conditions. Temps range from -40 to 56 F/-40 to 15 C. could be snowy, rainy, dry, or mild. Precipitation is usually snow until May, rain from May onward. Road and riding routes are dependent on snow, ice, and mud conditions.

Summer: Usually mild temps during the day, but still cold at night. Temps from 32 to 86 F / 0 to 30 C. Mosquitoes can be bad during late June through early August. Mud can be bad throughout summer. Some snow may remain on alpine passes. Rain likely in June.

Fall: Usually mild temps during day through mid September. Snowfalls can occur from late August onward. Temps range from -35 C to 20 C. Mud can be quite bad. Temps below freezing most nights. Rain likely.

Activities:

A big part of your time in the taiga will be spent with families, telling stories, and getting to know the Tsaatan people and their culture. Activities will vary depending on time of year and weather. Activities may include playing cards, outdoor games with children, learning to cook bread, storytelling, nature walks, berry picking, swimming, or watching a handicraft demonstration. You will most likely be able to help milk or collect water, whereas some activities are best left to the herders. If you don't know how to do something, please do not offer to help. If there is something that you would like to do, such as hiking, learning about plant life, or hearing local myths, communicate with your translator and TCVC guide. Please do not expect to be entertained at all times. Visitors should be prepared to sit back, be quiet and observe.

Money

Large quantities of money and valuables should be left behind in the locked storage room at the TCVC. The only money you will need in the taiga is for handicrafts and souvenir items sold by community members. Prices range from 3,000-50,000 MNT for items of varying design and quality. Small denominations of bills are best, as change is rarely, if ever, available in the taiga. Purchases can be made directly with herders.

Gift Purchasing and Giving:

The Tsaatan make a variety of original handicrafts, including reindeer antler carvings, animal skin bags, and bark baskets. By purchasing handicrafts in the TCVC when they are available, you are supporting a system that encourages equitability and sustainability in the community. This is encouraged so as to benefit the whole of the community as well as the individual craftsman. If you do purchase items directly from a herder, we ask that you be aware of certain cultural sensitivities, such as competition and value. If possible, try to purchase items from various herders so all families can benefit from your visit. If an item is not definitively priced, then suggest a price that is fair (not too high, not too low.)

Gift giving is a common practice when visiting a family in Mongolia, though it is not required or expected. If you choose to bring gifts to the taiga you should be aware of gift-giving etiquette. Gifts should be given by placing the item in your two hands, palms facing up. The gift giver should roll down their sleeves and cover their head with a hat or scarf if possible. Give the recipient a moment to prepare in the same way before lunging the gift towards them. When they receive the gift, they will touch it to their forehead as a sign of appreciation and usually put the item away. If you are receiving a gift, reverse this procedure. If you are visiting many families, it is best to distribute gifts equally so as to avoid confusion or jealousy. Appropriate gifts include toys for children, rope or knives for men, fabric or household items for women, batteries, books, key chains, postcards or items from your homeland. Expensive items are not necessary and may embarrass the families.

Giving large quantities of food or essential commodities such as canvas is not typically perceived as a gift, but more closely resembles relief or charitable handouts. This is best left to organizations that have carefully planned and executed this type of activity. One of the main reasons for the development of the TCVC was to empower and enable the Tsaatan people to meet their own basic needs in a sustainable and self-sufficient manner. The TCVC provides herders with economic opportunities that generate long-term income so families can buy goods such as flour and canvas for a lifetime rather than rely on the unpredictable donations of others to meet their needs in the short term. If you wish to make a larger contribution either in cash or in goods, you may want to consider directing it to the Community Fund based at the TCVC. This way the whole community can benefit from your generosity.

Payment for Services:

Payment for your trip should happen ONLY at the TCVC with the assistance of a TCVC manager. You should NEVER pay trip costs when you are out in the taiga directly to your guide or cook. (Handicraft money can be given directly to the seller.) The TCVC was founded on herders' desire for a centralized and transparent accounting system, where community members work together and receive fair, standardized wages. This system only works if all parties, including guests, operate according to TCVC protocol. At the end of your trip you will be given a signed receipt that details the total cost of your trip. Set portions go to guides and cooks who worked on your trip, and to the Tsaatan Community Fund. A small portion goes to operational costs of running the TCVC such as firewood, waste disposal, repairs, and insurance. TCVC trips are priced as packages. The exact units of goods or services you use (for example, number of horses and number of days), including a set portion for the Community Fund and for operational expenses, is calculated to arrive at the total trip price. No two trips are the same, so it is almost impossible to give exact price quotes or per day fees. Please be assured that your trip cost will be carefully calculated based *only on the goods and services you use*. However, as is true with trip outfitters and tour operators, unit prices are not typically disclosed. Guests are asked to kindly respect this pricing system. An itemized list of goods and services used can certainly be made upon request. All payments should be made in cash, in local currency (MNT), or via bank transfer if arrangements are made with the manager on duty.

Tipping:

Tipping is not required, but of course appreciated. You may wish to tip your guides, cooks, or hosts. If so, please specify who the tip is for when handing money to someone. For example, is it to be shared amongst all the guides, or is it just for the individual you are handing it to? As for amount, it is really up to the visitor. As a general guideline, you may want to consider a total amount given in tips equal to 10-30% of your total trip price. If you wish to give more than this amount, it is best to consider a donation to the Tsaatan Community Fund, which benefits the entire community through micro loans, scholarships, and community projects. Talk to a TCVC manager about how to donate to the community fund.

Donations:

Contributions of all sizes can be made directly to the TCVC Community Fund or to The Itgel Foundation, with specific indication that you'd like your funds to support the TCVC project. Either way, 100% of contributions go to support the TCVC and the Tsaatan people. Contributions made at the TCVC should be in local currency (MNT) and directed to a designated TCVC manager, or the TCVC accountant, Bayanjargal. Visit www.itgel.org for more information or to donate through The Itgel Foundation once you've returned to your home country.

Photography/Film

Professional photographers and film makers are subject to special regulations, including the requirement as stated by the Human Rights Commission of Mongolia to form a written contract with the Tsaatan community prior to production activities. Requests to film and photograph the community or taiga for professional/commercial purposes should be made in advance of your trip and contracts developed in conjunction with the managers at the TCVC.

All photographers (professional or amateur) should respect the following requests of the community: Before taking out your camera, you are asked to introduce yourself and ask permission to take pictures. It is considered very rude to see a tourist riding into camp with their camera out, snapping pictures of people and reindeer as though the camp is a museum exhibit. After you have introduced yourself, you still must ask permission from individuals when taking their picture or pictures of their animals. Please respect people's requests if they refuse to have their picture taken, particularly with regards to sensitive subject matter such as shaman in ritual dress or private household activities. To really ensure that your picture taking is positively perceived and enjoyable for the community, you may want to consider mailing prints back to the TCVC to share with the community. Please do not make promises to send back pictures if you do not intend to do so.

Fishing/Hunting

Permits are required for all fishing and hunting. You must check with the Ministry of Nature and Environment, local authorities, and community members before engaging in these activities.

Health, safety, and comfort

The countryside presents many possibilities for injury and illness. Adhere to these tips and you have a better chance of being safe and healthy.

- Follow horse guidelines as instructed, without exception
- Avoid petting dogs. Rabies is very common
- Never handle or approach a sick animal
- Avoid altitude sickness by staying hydrated

- Do not drink unfiltered or untreated water even if it looks clean
- Do not lie down in the back of vehicles. It can cause nausea with delayed onset
- Cover mouth/nose in vehicles if dusty or if you smell gas
- Stay clean and well rested. Wash hands and change socks/underwear regularly
- DRESS APPROPRIATELY! Wear layers, stay dry, wear a hat, and cover extremities
- Use insect repellent and sunscreen
- It is strongly advised to avoid guns, as they can sometimes discharge unexpectedly
- Take vitamins or supplements, and be sure to pack snacks for emergency food
- Avoid foods that may be spoiled, raw, contaminated, moldy, or hard on your stomach
- Understand lightning danger and familiarize yourself with lightning strike prevention
- Do not hike or wander off alone in the taiga
- Adhere to the advice of your guides

Brucellosis Prevention:

Brucellosis is an infectious disease that affects people and animals. It can trigger flu-like symptoms and cause permanent damage to joints and reproductive organs. To avoid contracting this disease, follow these steps:

- Never drink un-boiled milk or dairy products made from unboiled milk
- Do not eat uncooked meat, especially organs
- Never make contact with wounds, sores, or genital areas on an animal
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling animals
- Avoid overtly sick animals, blood, placenta, or other bodily fluids on the ground

IX. What To Do If...

Someone in your group becomes ill or is injured

Always try to remain calm. If you need help, talk to your TCVC guide and translator. TCVC guides are trained in basic first aid and may be able to assist with cases of minor burns, cuts, and sickness. Some community members are highly knowledgeable about medicinal plants and herbal remedies. For more serious cases, please alert your guide and/or TCVC manager in the area you are visiting and they will call for help via radio. Get to an area with communications links and access to transportation. The local hospital in Tsagaan Nuur is equipped with basic facilities to treat some illnesses and injuries, but if more advanced care is needed, please make your way to Murun or UB as soon as possible. For severe emergencies, helicopter evacuations may be considered. Radios can be used to communicate with the TCVC managers in Tsagaan Nuur, who can then call UB for help. SOS Medica Mongolia Clinic is a private clinic that coordinates medical evacuations. Your home embassy may be able to help as well. Please be aware that helicopter evacuations can cost \$20,000 USD or more, and the patient is personally responsible for this payment. To prepare for an event such as severe injury or illness in remote places, you are advised to consider obtaining evacuation insurance through a private broker prior to your trip. You should provide evacuation information and instructions to managers upon arrival at TCVC if you have coverage. To prepare for less severe situations, all travelers are advised to carry a first-aid kit with them, supplied with antibiotics, bandaging materials, pain medicine, and anti-diarrhea medicine.

You suspect or witness illegal activity or are the victim of a crime

Contact the local police in Tsagaan Nuur or Murun to report a crime. Let a TCVC manager know if you suspect criminal activity during your trip.

A border patrol officers ask you for money, insists that you use their horses, or refuses to issue a permit

It is best to remain calm and respectful and ask for clarification about relevant laws. If the law or procedure being suggested seems unreasonable, request to see the written law book or policy. Border officers should not coerce you to use their own horses, vehicles, or friends' ger camps, or create ultimatums for your trip. If you suspect you are being coerced to obtain services you don't need or want, are being asked for a bribe or unreasonable fine, or are being treated unlawfully, seek out a higher level authority. For example, contact the Murun or UB headquarters if you experience suspicious activities at one of the rural border posts. In the event of a more serious situation, contact the police, a local attorney or your home embassy.

You wish to stay in the taiga longer than originally planned or end your trip early

Logistical changes can be difficult to coordinate when drivers, air tickets, and horses are all involved. Tsaatan guides usually travel long distances to be ready for your trip, and cancellations can cause major inconveniences. Visitors are asked to make all efforts to stick to their original itinerary, or work together with TCVC managers to effectively make changes. Unexpected logistical changes may be possible by communicating by radio with the managers stationed at the TCVC. TCVC trip invoices are not issued until the conclusion of the trip so as to allow for unexpected changes to the original itinerary.

You wish to stay in a family's orts instead of the orts hotel or your own tent

The orts hotel and tent camping are much more straightforward ways of over-nighting in the taiga, and are thus the recommended options for visitors. These options ease the burdens of families to feed and host guests, and give visitors the freedom to sleep, eat, and change clothes more comfortably. However, if you feel strongly about staying with a family, you are advised to speak with your guide and the host family to discuss possible arrangements.

You are offered milk products to eat/ drink and are worried about their safety

Virtually all dairy products in Mongolia are made by being boiled first, making them perfectly safe to consume. If you suspect that a product is not boiled, you can politely ask, or simply take a piece and discreetly put it aside.

X. Contacts and Information

Contacting the TCVC:

Via the web	www.itgel.org/visitors_center.htm
Via Tsagaan Nuur post office phone	(976) 01-382-265-19
Via TCVC Manager's Mobile	(976) 9579-1840

You may also wish to send a message via telegram to the TCVC to secure your reservation. This can be done from any post office in Mongolia with the help of a translator.

Contacting The Itgel Foundation:

Itgel is the NGO that has worked with the Tsaatan community to establish the TCVC. Itgel has worked closely with the community since 2002 and is a valuable resource of information about the Tsaatan and the taiga. However, Itgel does not own or manage the TCVC, nor does the organization take any revenue from TCVC trips in any way. It is important for visitors to remember that the TCVC is 100% *independently owned and operated* by the Tsaatan community. Itgel is NOT a tour operator and does not have authority over TCVC reservations, financial transactions, or special requests. Itgel can provide general information about the TCVC, and can in some cases prepare trip quotes based on TCVC pricing standards, or serve as a liaison for direct communications between travelers and TCVC managers (particularly for commercial/professional visitors such as film makers or

researchers). However, Itgel should not be contacted for logistical support, requests for obtaining border permits, or for travel tips on transport and/or translators. This information should be accessed from tourism resources such as the TCVC's officially-endorsed tour operator partners (see website), guidebooks, the Tourist Information Center, or the Internet.

Via the web

www.itgel.org

Via e-mail

itgelfoundation@yahoo.com

Other Sources of Information:

For general information, you may wish to send an e-mail to reindeer@hosvgol.org. You will receive an auto reply with useful travel information.

TCVC strongly recommends that all visitors consider organizing their trip with support from a travel company/tour operator. A list of TCVC officially-endorsed tour operator partners can be found on the TCVC website by going to www.itgel.org and clicking on the TCVC link. These companies can help you access the TCVC, arrange translators and transportation, assist with border permits, and ensure that your trip is safe and enjoyable.

The Lonely Planet Guidebook is also a great resource for helping plan your trip to the TCVC. See the section on Tsagaan Nuur, Hovsgol.

ENJOY YOUR JOURNEY!