

MONGOLIA



The Eagle Hunters of the Altai

9 days of adventure
with expert

Hamid-Sardar

better  moments

Photography with passion



Photography may be my first passion, but traveling is a close second. I spent decades exploring the globe with my camera and out of this passion, Better Moments was born in 2011. Since then, I have worked with the world's most renowned photographers to offer high-end workshops and expeditions for photo enthusiasts worldwide.

On our workshops, everyone is welcome. No matter if you have recently discovered your passion for photography or if you are an emerging pro – our workshops cater to everyone's needs and our experts are all experienced teachers that will adapt to your personal skill level.

Our mission is to help you to take your photography to the next level, refine your own style and sharpen your technical skills.

Additionally, we want to inspire each other, create lasting memories and enjoy the best moments in life.

Better Moment's exclusive workshops in landscape, travel and wildlife photography take place in unique locations around the world. From the Himalaya region to Africa's deserts, from Scandinavia's fjords to Australia's Outback – we like to travel off the beaten track and work with local agencies as we are always striving to leave only footprints behind.

I am looking forward to meeting you on one of our adventures,

Christian Nørgaard

better moments



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Christian Nørgaard

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Our guests love to travel with us – which is why we are lucky enough to welcome them again and again.



LET'S GET SOCIAL

For inspiring experiences, real-time updates, the latest trends or casual conversation, explore our social networks for all things travel.



LinkedIn



YouTube



Instagram

BETTERMOMENTS.COM

You can view our current photography workshops on the Better Moments website, where you will find all dates and details – and can reserve a spot for your dream trip.



NEWSLETTER

Stay up-to-date with our workshops, experts, and special offers: sign up to our bi-monthly newsletter – and receive Christian Nørgaard's guide to street photography for free.

SIGN UP AND RECEIVE A FREE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE.

"I think that Better Moments' workshops are some of the best organized, most educational and most inspirational group workshops I have ever worked on. So I would encourage you to join us. Come along and have a great time, learn, be inspired and take great pictures."

Steve McCurry

Our passionate experts

We are proud to work with some of the best photographers in the industry who are experts in their field and have years of experience in guiding and teaching photography workshops.



Steve McCurry

National Geographic,
World Press Photo
first place



Michael Nichols

Wildlife journalist,
National Geographic
editor



James Nachtwey

World Press Photo Award
winner and TIME Magazine
photographer



Sisse Brimberg

National Geographic
photographer



James Whitlow Delano

Award-winning visual
storyteller & Pulitzer
Center grantee



Hamid Sardar-Afkhami

Writer, photographer,
award-winning
filmmaker



Lars van de Goor

Hasselblad Master
Landscape
photographer



Marco Di Lauro

World Press
Photo Award



Peter Eastway

AIPP Grand Master of
Photography, Publisher Better
Photography Magazine



Steve Bloom

National Geographic
photographer



Tom D. Jones

Hasselblad Master
& European Fine Art
photographer



Andreas H. Bitesnich

Award-winning fine art
photographer



Arne Hodalič

National Geographic
photographer &
photo editor



Laurent Baheux

Award-winning
wildlife photographer



What our guests say about us

"It was a marvelous workshop with a lot of opportunities for great pictures. Obviously, the highlight was the night in Riisitunturi National Park watching the Northern Lights. It was the whole atmosphere having a rustic dinner in the hikers hut after shooting the sunset and waiting for the Northern Light which is staying in my memories."

Bernd Beykirch, Germany



"I found out that one of my favourite photographers, Lars van de Goor, was doing a workshop in the Netherlands so I signed up for the workshop and was introduced to Christian, the founder of the company, and I knew immediately that this would be a great workshop just by talking to him and seeing how incredibly well organized and precise everything was planned out. The hotels were first class, the food was phenomenal, which is important, and more importantly, each day was very well planned out and it has been a really great experience."

Aubra Franklin, USA

"Everybody has something to offer to the group, so we learn from each other, we share things, we have workshops in the evenings where we talk about what went well, what went wrong... and we see a lot of different styles, a lot of different techniques. And that is the good thing about this trip, it is really all about photography!"

Peter Dorr, The Netherlands.















The Eagle Hunters of the Altai

Following Hamid Sardar, Harvard scholar of Inner Asian Studies and professional photographer we embark on a memorable journey into the culture of Kazakh eagle hunters in Mongolia's Altai foothills. Exploration photography is not just about capturing beautiful portraits and breath-taking landscapes; it's about uncovering the DNA of a land and its people and letting it become the guiding principle in our art.

In Kazakh culture, art – indeed memory itself – is inconceivable without this totem-like connection to the fabulous eagle that seem to tap into early layers of human consciousness and the religious experiences of the archaic hunter. For nomads who still live in the wild, survival is based on imitation of wild beasts such as the eagle. Man hunts, heals and moves through nature by emulating the intelligence of animals. This spiritual connection between man and animal will be the guiding theme of our workshop.



Mongolia highlights

Better Moments' mission is to deliver exclusive workshops and we want you to explore your passion for photography and work with one of the best photographers, Hamid Sardar, during your Mongolia expedition.

■ ON LOCATION

- Teaching and training in the best techniques and personal hints and advises
- Composition and focus on lines, golden section, perspective, foreground
- Work in different lighting and with short/long exposure times and aperture
- How to handle equipment with care on location
- Private hands-on lessons by Hamid Sardar that can help to take your photography skills to the next level
- How to approach local people in natural way
- The secret behind the travel and reportage photography

■ IN CLASSROOM

- Review and constructive criticism of the images taken during the day
- Digital workflow
- How to create a narrative for a book, magazines and exhibitions
- Portfolio Review

PRICE & BOOKING



PHOTO BY HAMID SARDAR









There are no strangers



Renowned photographer, documentarist and scholar, Hamid Sardar, has a Ph.d. in Inner Asian Studies from Harvard University. Hamid is therefore uniquely qualified to introduce the often reclusive and enigmatic cultures of Mongolia. His work has been featured in National Geographic, Le Figaro and Paris Match, and he has produced several internationally acclaimed documentaries about the nomads of Mongolia.

PHOTO BY HAMID SARDAR





Itinerary

DAY 0

■ ARRIVAL IN ULAANBAATAR

Spend the day exploring the Mongolian capital. In the evening, there will be an orientation dinner at the hotel to meet Hamid and the other guests, followed by a slide show and discussion.

DAY 1

■ WELCOME FEAST IN A YURT AND MEETING THE EAGLE HUNTERS I

Altantsogts is a landscape devoid of trees where the rolling steppe is crisscrossed by low pale foothills of the Mongol Altai range. The eye is naturally pulled across the horizon where it hovers between the sky and the earth. Yet, this bleak environment supports one of the most cheerful and hospitable cultures of Central Asian.

We will begin our workshop by a great lunch feast inside the village elders richly decorated yurt. The Kazaks decorate their tents and houses with bright weavings and abstract patterns that imitate ram's horns, birds and flowers. The inner life of the Kazak, it seems, flourishes in inverse proportion to the scarcity of their geographic environment.

The first afternoon will be spent developing rapport with our hosts, before setting off in small group projects focusing on portraits of both eagles and hunters.

In the evening, we will have our first peer review of the days work and discuss shooting strategies for the following day.

DAY 2

■ THE EAGLE HUNTERS I (ALTANTSOGTS) - HOW TO CATCH AN EAGLE

During our visits to the nomad camps we will observe many methods of catching an eagle. Most commonly the Kazakhs will lure the eagle into a net trap using as decoy a bait-crow tied near a dead animal. After a heavy rain eagles would sometimes become so wet that they could not fly very easily, the same thing happened after an eagle gorged itself on carrion making it possible for a man on a fast horse to capture the bird before it took to the air. Kazakhs insist, however, that the bravest eagles, those that are trained for catching wolves, must be directly taken from the nest right before their maiden flight.

Dinner at base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.

DAY 3

■ THE EAGLE HUNTERS II (ALTANTSOGTS) - FEARLESS JUVENILES

Day three will focus on training young eagles called the "balapan". Young eagles have no instinctual fear when they emerge from the nest. They learn to avoid attacking dangerous predators such as the wolf and fox, so you must capture the juvenile eagle before it learns to fly, when it is fearless. The Kazakh hunter then covers the eagle's head with a silver studded leather hood and for about fifteen days took we take turns carrying it around wherever we went to accustom her to the human scent. The hunter will lift

her hood only to feed her once a day with fresh meat of marmots and rabbits they hunt around the camp.

Dinner at base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.

DAY 4

■ THE EAGLE HUNTERS III (ALTANTSOGTS) - TRAINING AND FEEDING THE EAGLES

Today we will divide into small groups and observe hunters training and feeding their eagles. Owning an eagle may seem impractical – the raptor must be fed a marmot or a rabbit every other day and when it is cold in winter the nomads will sometimes feed it from their own flocks. While our western scientific taxonomy sees only one species of golden eagle the Kazakhs see a number of sub-variations. Among these they consider the Altai Aqiq or the 'Altai White Shoulder', to be the largest and bravest. They also distinguish their eagles according to variations of eye color which they classify as white, blue, yellow, red, and deep brown.

Dinner at base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.



DAY 5

■ THE EAGLE HUNTERS IV (SAGSAI) - WHERE THE EAGLES FLY

We continue our immersion into the eagle training process. The hunter accustoms the eagle to take bits of rabbit meat from his hand – gradually increasing the distance between the bird and himself while dragging a rabbit carcass and crying “ka ka ka”. Slowly an indispensable trust develops between eagle and man, so that even the family’s youngest children can caress the bird without any sign of aggression. He then repeats the same while mounted on his horse. These short training flights will allow us to set up the camera in various creative positions in order to capture the eagle in flight.

Dinner at base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.

DAY 6

■ THE EAGLE HUNTERS V (SAGSAI) - RELEASING THE EAGLES INTO THE WILD

Kazakh falconry involves cruelty and death. Like bull fighting it encourages both the savage and the heroic instincts in man. Some say that hunting wolves and foxes with eagles is unnatural, because an eagle would never attack such predators in the natural state. It is a hunting ritual bathed in blood and poetry, but unlike trophy hunting and commercial poaching, Kazakh falconry seems to be culturally relevant while retaining a sense of traditional conservation. The Kazakhs understand that eagles

are still wild animals that cannot be kept forever, and so they must be returned to the wild before they lose their dreams of freedom. We will follow a hunter to the highest point on the mountain and photograph the elaborate ritual of releasing the eagle back into the wild. Participants will be encouraged to capture the complicity and emotion between eagle and hunter.

Dinner at the base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.

DAY 7

■ MEET CONTORTIONISTS, WRESTLERS, ARCHERS, AND HORSE FIDDLE PLAYERS

The Mongolian hinterland has much more photo subjects to offer than the Eagle Hunters. Today, we will meet wrestlers and archers, and fiddle players and contortionists. In fact, in Mongolia, contortion is a cultural practice, which expresses itself through dance, and it is as common as ballet to the western world. Mongolia has produced some of the most magnificent contortion acts in the world thanks to their grace and poise that exhibit the beauty and capability of the human body. Each single movement between the various poses is fluid in finely tuned positions right to the fingers and tiptoes.

The two-stringed fiddles adorned with horse heads are an important part of the Mongolian nomad culture and date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The fiddle does not only

have significance as a musical instrument, but also as an integral part of rituals and everyday activities.

Wrestling, along with horseback riding and archery, is one of Mongolia’s three manly sports. The sport known as Bök is a cultural tradition which dates back centuries. It is the main focus in the life of many young Mongolian men as it defines manliness within the community.

Dinner at base camp followed by evening peer review and discussion.

DAY 8

■ FLIGHT BACK TO ULAAN-BAATAR

Today, we will return to the Mongolian capital. In the evening, we will have dinner at our hotel followed by individual presentations and discussions.

DAY 9

■ DEPARTURE

Return flights home.









Quick guide

We wish you to travel with the greatest possible comfort and to know that you have received as much information as possible.

■ GETTING THERE

Chinggis Khaan International Airport is the international airport serving Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, situated 18 km southwest of the capital.

The airport is due for replacement in 2019 by the new Khöshigt Valley Airport which is located at the Khoshigt Valley, 52 km south of Ulaanbaatar city centre.

There are international flights arriving from Seoul, Hongkong, Berlin, Istanbul, Tokyo and Moscow.

■ VISA

A 30-day tourist visa is required for most countries and can be easily obtained at any Mongolian embassy, consulate, consulate-general or honorary consul. However, a number of countries can visit visa free, including citizens of the USA, Canada and Germany.

If you are traveling to Mongolia from a country that has no Mongolian consulate, you can pick up a 30-day tourist visa on arrival at the airport in Ulaanbaatar. You will need T108,000 (or dollar equivalent) and two passport photos – you should also have a pre-approval letter from an organization or company in Mongolia.

■ WEATHER

Expect warm and mostly dry weather in June and July, with some thunderstorms.

The average temperature in June is 15°C, ranging from 9°C to 22°C.

■ LANGUAGE

The official language of Mongolia is Mongolian, and is spoken by 95% of the population.

Russian is the most frequently spoken foreign language in Mongolia, followed by English, although English has been gradually replacing Russian as the second language. Korean has gained popularity as tens of thousands of Mongolians work in South Korea.

■ CURRENCY

The Mongolian monetary unit is the Tögrög (MNT)

■ QUICK GUIDE

Ulaanbaatar, where 1 million people out of Mongolia's 2.8 million population, is the country's economic, cultural and political center and has a number of tourist attractions and hosts the most varied types of entertainment.

Gandan is the largest and most significant monastery in Mongolia and one of Ulaanbaatar's most interesting sights. Built in the mid 19th century, it is the only monastery where Buddhist services continued to function even during the communist past. The Migjid Janraisig Temple is an important part of Gandan Monastery, housing the majestic new gilded statue of Migjid Janraisig, decorated with jewels.

The Natural History Museum has departments of Geography, Geology, Flora and Fauna, and Paleontology in the museum. Displays of stuffed and embalmed animals including the rare Gobi bear and wild camel, birds and fish will give you a good idea about the rich fauna of Mongolia.

The Museum of National History offers the richest collection on the history of Mongolia, from Stone Age to modern times. It allows retrospect the unique culture of the horse riding steppe nomads and their lifestyle. The exhibition contains many artifacts and arts, military equipment and arms of Genghis Khan Warriors.

Zaisan Hill offers the best views of Ulaanbaatar and the surrounding nature.

There are many uniquely Mongolian artifacts can buy in Ulaanbaatar. Perhaps the most popular product with tourists is the high quality cashmere made here. You can buy from the factory shops, the department store and various museum shops.

PRICE & BOOKING





Equipment

Whether this is your first trip or your "hundredth" workshop with us, it's always helpful to have a rundown of what items you may want to pack so you have a travel checklist. Bookmark this packing list, because you'll want to refer back to it to make sure you've thought of everything you might want to pack.

■ CAMERA

The camera list is for inspiration, since you know better than anyone what equipment you prefer.

- Bring your own laptop computer and storage medium
- Camera body(ies)
- Tripod
- Lenses, If you are working with a 24x36mm camera system, lenses from 12mm to approx. 55mm is obvious. And a "long lens" such as a 180mm. If you are working with a medium format camera, lenses from 28mm to approx. 80mm is obvious. And a "long lens" such as a 300 mm.
- Bag for all camera gear
- Light bag for easy hiking with camera bodies and accessories
- Cleaning kit for cameras and lenses
- Rain/dust covers for cameras and lenses
- Charger for batteries
- Spare batteries
- Standard power converter
- Raw processing software
- Memory cards and card wallets
- Memory card reader
- USB key to exchange images
- Lens extenders
- Camera straps for ease of changing from one camera to another
- Graduated filter set
- Filter holder
- High quality polarizing filter
- Lens belt





PHOTO BY HAMID SARDAR

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