

Photos of Mongolia

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Photos of Mongolia by Stefan Cruysberghs

In October 2014 I went to Mongolia together with my girlfriend and a few friends. Our main goal was to go to the remote Altay Mountains and see the old Kazakh tradition of hunting with trained golden eagles and trying to make great images of them.

Today, approximately 250 Kazakh people in the Altay Mountains of Mongolia still practice this ancient art. The tradition of hunting with golden eagles probably has started by the nomadic Khitans from Manchuria in northern China around 940AD. Genghis Khan himself kept a reported 1000 hunting birds.

The Kazakh people are dependent from the season. In winter time they use their eagles to hunt rabbits, foxes and wolves which were essential for food and clothing in the past. But it is more, it's an art form in which the right balance between strength, agility and smoothness is required and where an intense bond between bird and its master is required. The world is evolving fast, but these Kazakh people still continue this tradition and they do it with a lot of passion and so they keep their cultural heritage alive.

We attended the very exciting two-day Golden Eagle Festival. Every October the Kazakhs celebrate their traditions during the annual this festival. The eagle hunters come from all directions and from far remote areas in the Altai Mountains and some travel days on horseback to come to participate. The festival starts with an impressive parade: seventy hunters with their eagles on their arms are riding their horses and camels, the youngest was nine, the oldest eighty. They wear beautiful traditional costumes. Stefan tells ShutYourAperture.















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