

Organization: Three Camel Lodge

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1. Project

Three Camel Lodge, Gobi Desert, Mongolia

2. Summary

Three Camel Lodge was built in 2002 to serve as a base for tourists to explore Mongolia's Gobi Desert on eco-friendly travel principles. The Lodge uses both solar and wind power and local artisans crafted the roofs of the buildings in accordance with Mongolian Buddhist architecture, without using a single nail. Hunting has been prohibited within a 12-mile radius and we actively fight against unauthorized removal of dinosaur fossils from paleontological sites. The Lodge funds nature conservation clubs for children in local secondary schools and serves as a training venue for local nature conservation units and park rangers.

3. Project Description:

Built to complement its natural surroundings and to utilize renewable energy sources, the Three Camel Lodge uses both solar and wind power. Local artisans crafted the roofs of the buildings in accordance with the canons of Mongolian Buddhist architecture, without using a single nail.

Accommodations include gers, traditional nomadic felt tents. Made of a latticed wood structure covered with layers of felt and canvas, each ger is heated by a wood stove and furnished with beautifully painted wood-framed beds. The camp restaurant and western-style toilet and shower facilities are located in a central building found a few hundred feet from the gers. Based on double occupancy, the gers provide an authentic and memorable taste of Mongolian culture. Most visitors find their stays at ger camps to be among their most enjoyable experiences in Mongolia.

The Lodges' foremost commitment is to Mongolia and her people. All of the staff are dedicated to the preservation of Mongolia's natural and cultural wonders and believe that Mongolia can benefit greatly from the development of an ecologically conscientious and sustainable approach to tourism, research and exploration that could reduce the demand and need for industrial development.

Employment

The lodge has made significant contribution in creating jobs for the population located in the remote area of the Gobi Desert. About 70% of the full time staff of the lodge are local residents and the Lodge employs and hires substantial numbers of local drivers for part-time jobs during the summer.

The Lodge works with several nomadic families throughout the year who supply the camp with dairy products, meat, home grown vegetables and horses and camels. There is a souvenir shop in one of the main buildings which sells art and crafts and clothes (such as camel wool socks, wooden crafts, paintings and leather goods etc), made by local artisans and families.

By promoting sustainable tourism practices, the Lodge helps to provide economic stability for many local communities and individuals thereby reducing the necessity to relocate to cities — clearly a desirable alternative to rapid urbanization and industrialization.

Local Community

The Lodge actively supports and makes donations to several local nature conservation organizations for children and teens. The Lodge has been involved actively in educational programs for these clubs. It invited two of Mongolia's best-known paleontologists and botanists this summer to the Gobi to give a lecture to the club members, with all expenses paid by the lodge.

The Lodge also arranged litter collection at one of the Gobi's most visited spots, the Flaming Cliffs, in which the nature conservation club members volunteered. At the present, the Lodge has supported and contributed financial assistance towards the establishment of a "Youth Garden" in the neighboring Bulgan village, initiated by the same club members.

The Lodge is also a member of "Ongiin River" movement established to protect the Gobi's precious river Ongiin which now has dried up in most parts due to mines polluting the river. The Lodge donates funds, participates in its meetings, and strongly supports its various activities aimed at raising awareness of these mines.

The Lodge arranges and funds local arts and sports day each spring in which nearby town residents and nomads actively participate.

Nature Conservation

One of the founding ideas of the Lodge was that it would compliment the natural surroundings and that it would contribute to the preservation of the wildlife and flora and fauna. The Lodge has an experimental field where it provides constant irrigation to observe how much produce the Gobi soil can provide if water is provided constantly. It has a garden where several indigenous plants have been planted. Several very rare plants were replanted in the Lodge garden under the supervision of a botanist hired by the Lodge.

During the design and development of the Lodge, we initiated a cooperative agreement, the first of its kind, with local government and National Park authorities. Hunting has been prohibited within a 12-mile radius and the Lodge serves as a base for scientific research. We also actively fight against unauthorized removal of dinosaur fossils from paleontological sites and animal poaching.

Staff training

Understanding that the best knowledge and expertise of local flora and fauna comes from locals, the Lodge seeks to employ as many locals as possible for different posts at the lodge. Currently over 70% of the staff are recruited locally. Training is provided in English, accounting, cooking, waitressing and management. Staff are also encouraged to apply for scholarships for various off-site development courses.

All of the Lodge's guides (all local Mongolians) are taught and trained to promote cultural interaction based on mutual respect and an understanding of cultural differences. We strive to maintain a delicate balance, neither accelerating the modernization of ancient cultures, nor suppressing their natural evolution.

The Lodge provides ongoing training for guides and drivers so that travelers receive interpretive environmental information regarding conservation issues throughout the areas of the Gobi that they are exploring.

Commitment to Educational Travel

Consistent with the Lodge's efforts to bring a truly cross-cultural perspective to travelers' experiences, they have developed excellent working relationships with leading Mongolian and international educators and non-governmental groups. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, either depending on the specific backgrounds of visitors to the Lodge or the schedules of Mongolian scholars and researchers, the Lodge works to bring together Mongolian groups such as local museums, women's groups, naturalists, and medical researchers and their international counterparts, in order to foster the active exchange of information and resources between individuals and organizations.

Location and activities

The lodge is located in the southern most part of Mongolia, in the heart of the Gobi Desert. The Gobi's magnificent Gobi Gurvan Saikhan Mountain range is within view while the lodge itself is built on the eastern tip of Bulagtai Mountain. The mountain is home to a number of ancient burial sites belonging to different eras, some as early as

2000 years ago and are important archeological sites since they are evidence that the Gobi was inhabited by nomads long ago.

The Lodge serves as a base camp for travelers spending several nights in Gobi and arranges tours including trekking, paleontological digs, camel trekking, bird watching, photo safari, botanical trips, home stays and winter tours.

The Three Camel Lodge was selected as the “Best Ger Camp in Mongolia” by the Mongolian Tourism Association in 2003 and was awarded with “Best Tourism Brand” by Mongolia’s Chamber of Commerce in 2004.

By staying at the Three Camel Lodge, travelers are making a contribution to support the preservation and protection of the Gobi’s unique landscape and flora and fauna while helping Nomadic Expeditions to promote and introduce a new standard of eco-friendly lodges in the country. Mongolia’s first eco-lodge and its mission is to become Asia’s best model for eco-tourism and eco-lodges.