

# MONGOLIA

## HISTORY, SPACE AND THE ILLUSTRIOUS TAIMEN!

---

*Text: John Smit - pictures: John Smit & Henk Kippersluis*

---





**Mongolia. The country with the lowest population density in the world. A country with a rich history and impressive culture. The land of endless space and vistas. But for us fishermen, foremost the country where you can catch the illustrious and much desired “Hucho taimen”, the largest salmon species in the world! And if the opportunity arises to discover a new destination in a completely new developed area, on the Egg River, where plenty of taimen can be caught, we will take this opportunity with both hands. And so Henk and I went to visit this destination at the end of 2023. Looking for taimen, the wolf of the river!**



**Wilderness, untouched and with a great chance of seeing the illustrious taimen!**





**The Mongolian map**

Mongolia is a large country in Central Asia, compressed between China and Russia. But how big is it? It is larger than all the countries in Western Europe combined! And there are only 3.5 million people living in this enormous country, of which approximately 1.5 million live in the capital Ulaanbaatar. This makes it the least densely populated country in the world. Mongolia has a very rich history and was one of the most powerful countries in the world in the 15th and 16th century. All this happened under the watchful eye of Genghis Khan, who conquered almost the entire world! You can still feel that pride today and much in Mongolia is dedicated and named after this former great leader. The Mongols speak their own language, Mongolian, and traditionally are nomadic people. After all, there is plenty of room and you can see that when you travel through the country. Entire families still live in the traditional tents, the "ger", and live off the proceeds from herding cattle. They are very friendly and hospitable people who have learned to live in a country with a continental climate; hot summers and freezing winters. The country is also very special in terms of nature. It has vast mountain ranges in the west (Altai Mountains). And in the north it forms part of the Siberian plateau, in the east there are many forests bordering China and in the south there is the famous Gobi desert. In this country several rivers flow from large lakes and from the mountains that are rich in fish, including the taimen. And we are going to fish in one of those rivers!

#### Dzjengis Khan, the great conqueror!



**A**nd so Henk and I leave on this adventurous fishing trip. But not after we have of course prepared well and read up on Mongolia and taimen fishing. Henk and I are spin fishermen so that is the tackle that we packed. The best chance of actually finding out whether the taimen are really there is by simply going to see for ourselves. We only have a few fishing days in this pilot trip and spin fishing allows you to fish in spots and water layers a little faster. The material we take with us can best be described as medium-heavy to heavy pike fishing material. Rods up to 80 grams casting weight, reels in the 5000 series, 40lb lines and an extensive collection of lures with which we can target all layers of water, with various types of action and colors. We also had some surface baits made for this trip, imitations of mice and rats, because the taimen are known for grabbing rodents from the surface. And last but not least: we are of course bringing waders and boots, as well as warm waterproof clothing. We are going in September and it is already autumn, with a good chance of some colder weather.

#### THE TRIP AND ARRIVAL

We drive to Frankfurt by car, where we spend the night in one of the airport hotels. Wonderful to start the trip so relaxed, with a nice and

cold German beer! The flight is in the afternoon the next day so we can have an extensive breakfast and then take the shuttle bus to the airport. We fly directly (!) to Ulaanbaatar and the flight is only 8 hours. So that's perfect. We are lucky; the plane is almost empty so we can stretch out and rest a bit, great!

We land in Ulaanbaatar in the morning and are met by our local contact person, Dava. I have had a lot of contact with him during the preparation of this trip and it is nice to finally meet each other. Fortunately, the suitcases have also arrived and after a short visit to Dava's office and an explanation about his organization, he takes us to the hotel in the center of Ulaanbaatar. It is a beautiful modern hotel right next to Genghis Khan square! We agree that we will freshen up and then go on a few cultural excursions in Ulaanbaatar and the surrounding area. We don't want to miss that opportunity before we make the trip northwest towards the lodge and the river tomorrow!

We first visit a number of monasteries. In Mongolia, Buddhism is the largest religion and the monks who practice this faith daily live in the beautifully designed and colored monasteries. It is wonderful to see and to walk among the monks chanting their prayers. The contrast

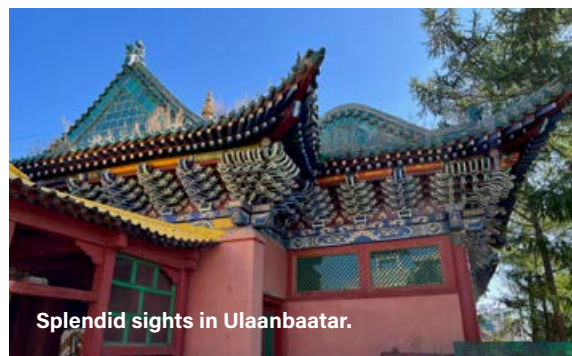


**Taimen lures that were successful during our trip**





Our guide Davaa, a very friendly and capable host.



Splendid sights in Ulaanbaatar.



The prayers: I prayed for a taimen - will my wish be granted?

between Western European and Mongolian culture could hardly be greater. And this is also what makes these types of fishing trips so special, these wonderful experiences! We take a few photos, walk past the prayers on the walls (the word 'taimen' was featuring in my own prayer) and then continue towards the "free market", a huge open market where absolutely everything is for sale. Here you can especially enjoy the typical Mongolian items such as the beautifully designed saddles for the Mongolian horses and the associated colorful clothing and boots. It's staggeringly beautiful. And then we go to the place where Genghis Khan was given the ultimate honor; the place where a HUGE statue was erected to him. And by huge I mean huge; as high as an entire flat (40 metres) and made entirely of stainless steel! Along the way we play a bit with birds of prey, but soon the statue looms in the distance and we marvel at this monument. Inside the statue is a museum and the restaurant where we have lunch. We take the stairs to enjoy the view. And after we've been stared at all day (we look quite tall compared to the locals), a group of Korean ladies would like to have their picture taken with these big guys; the result is a hilarious picture on top of the statue.

It was a fantastic first day. It's really worth to start our trip this way and see more of the population, culture and history. Henk and I enjoyed it and we thank Davaa for the beautiful day, but now it is time to go back to the hotel and rest. Tomorrow we have a long car journey to the lodge in the north. And there we have three days to explore the area and see if we can find the taimen. That night we dream of all the impressions and are awake before the alarm goes off, ready to hit the road

## HEADING FOR THE LODGE

Soon the houses disappear and the landscape becomes wider, even more beautiful and more impressive. We see the familiar tents everywhere, with large groups of cattle around them. I even spot a wolf and that's good news according to Davaa: wolves bring luck! We are enjoying it to the fullest, it is so beautiful here. After a good lunch in Erdenet, we go off road in the afternoon and the driver looks for the road along the hills towards the lodge.



Birds of prey are a part of Mongolian culture.

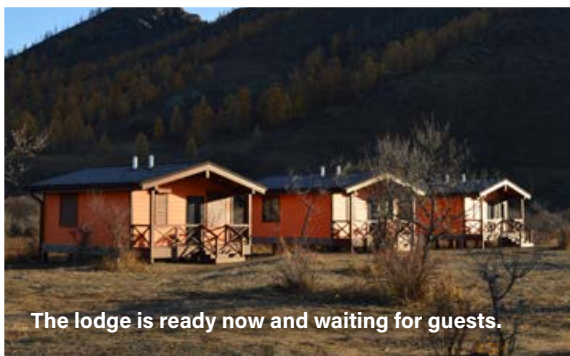




Wolves bring luck in Mongolia! Let's hope this one brings us a few nice taimen!



Our ger: simple but comfortable.



The lodge is ready now and waiting for guests.



The interior was very nice!

When it gets dark we are met by the second car from the lodge and together we travel further, sometimes wading through rivers and mud. It's a real adventure and it's clear that we are in very remote territory. In the evening we arrive at the lodge, which is still under construction. That's why Henk and I are sleeping in a ger for this trip. And that is no punishment. Very nice and luxuriously furnished with beds, table, groundsheet and cozy fire place. We have a late small dinner and go to sleep. The lodge is located on the river, of course we took a quick look and tomorrow at first light we will go fishing!

## WITHIN MINUTES!

The next morning Henk and I jump out of bed and walk to the river. The morning is fresh and the river has a lot of current. After a short exploration we choose the place where a small stream flows into the main river. Casting is easy here. I choose a small lure and Henk a white soft plastic on a 10 grams jig head. We cast in the direction of the outflow and gently reel in the lure. Bam! Already on his second cast Henk gets a bite and is into a ferociously fighting fish. Unbelievable, but sure enough, after a short fight the fish surfaces and the first taimen of about 80cm is a fact. We can't believe our luck: we are fishing no further than 200 meters from our tent. We are extremely happy and quickly take a few pictures. The fish has disturbed the place quite a bit, so we decide to walk back to our

camp, where we sit at the breakfast table with a big grin. Davaa looks at us in surprise when we show him the photos and he is of course just as happy. He knew that the river is good for taimen, but this is also a great start for him.

After breakfast we walk around the lodge that is under construction. It already looks fantastic so it will definitely be a top spot in the coming years! In the afternoon we drive by car to a stretch of river further away where we fish from the shore again. Henk manages to catch another taimen, this time a slightly smaller fish of about 60 cm long. But we are not complaining evidently: the first few hours of fishing already produced two taimen for us, great! After lunch we go out by boat. This gives us the opportunity to explore the river a little more and get an idea of the available hotspots. That is important because the bank has a lot of vegetation. With spinning rods that is not much of a problem, but fly fishermen need some more space. And there is sufficient space on the sandbanks in the river and on the longer, more open banks that are easily accessible by boat. So that's good news.

In the evening we fish along the banks again, also because taimen are more active in the evening and at night. And again Henk manages to catch one – this time a splendid fish of no less than a meter long! Fantastic, three taimen on the first day and although I look a bit disappointed at this 3-0 score, I am of course just as



The view, check out the ger.



Hucho taimen, commonly referred to as just Taimen, is the largest salmon species in the world. It can grow up to more than 150 cm and weigh over 60 kilograms. Its nickname is also 'wolf of the river'. Taimen own this name to its aggressive way of hunting and also to the fact that they can hunt in groups. The fish is highly protected and can only be fished under special conditions (only in season and strictly catch and release). Originally, taimen lived in a very large area, but now they are only in a few rivers in Russia and Mongolia. Taimen grows very slowly and can only reproduce from the age of 7 years. A large fish is therefore decades old. Great effort is now being made to take good care of the fish, which means that only a few organizations are allowed to fish for it. These organizations must also comply with the necessary formalities and actively support fish protection. Hucho taimen!



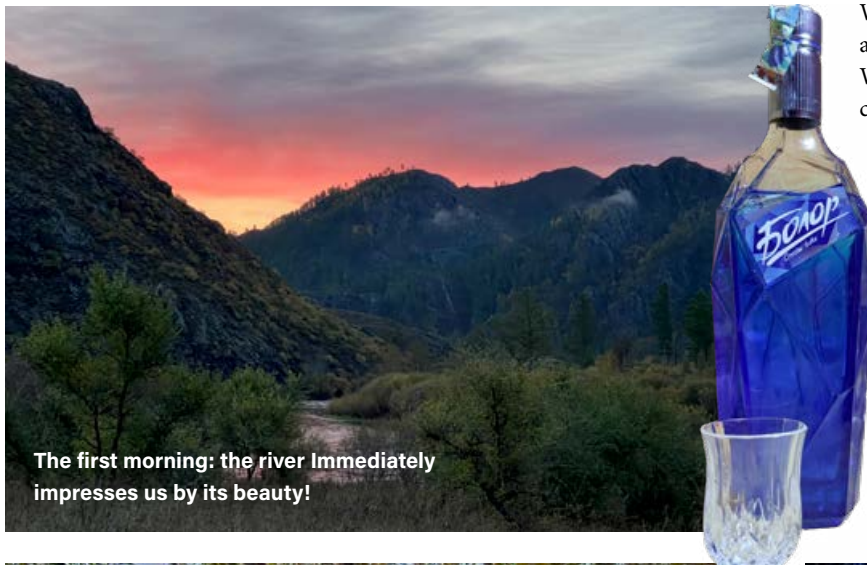
**Hucho taimen!**

happy for my traveling companion. Beautiful country – beautiful place – beautiful river and – last but not least: there are plenty of taimen! It simply couldn't be better, Henk and I are enjoying it to the fullest! And of course we had to drink a glass of vodka in the evening to celebrate.

## THE QUEST FOR MY FIRST TAIMENE

Of course, I am up before dawn the next morning. I quickly walk to a number of spots near the camp and sure enough: I also get a bite and manage to land a nice taimen of about 75cm. Just like the previous fish, the

fish is very healthy, beautifully colored and slim. They clearly still have to gain winter weight. I am having breakfast with a big grin because in the end this was also a target fish for me. And that goal has already been achieved for both of us, 4 taimen in about 6 hours of fishing... We have had worse!



**The first morning: the river immediately impresses us by its beauty!**

We decide to take the boat again and explore the river a bit more. We would also like to try to catch lenok trout and grayling that are also swim here. We try this in the faster rapids around the sandbanks and that proves to be a good approach. We not only catch two small taimen but I also manage to catch three lenok trout, very cool.

**Mongolian vodka to celebrate our early success.**



**The second cast and bingo!**



**A big taimen of one meter long**





The first one is for John.



Lenok trout also live around the camp.

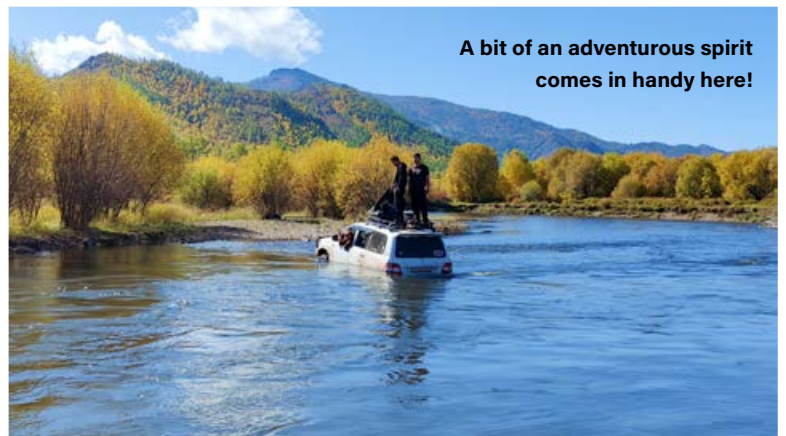
Still, fishing for lenok trout is not very wild now and because the river is flowing fast and the return journey will therefore be long, we decide to go back. We have seen enough to know that boat fishing along the river can be successful and that there are enough fish to be caught. Later at the camp, Henk manages to catch his first lenok trout as well.

## THE CLIMAX

On the third and last day of our short pilot trip, we decide to take a drive overland to a river junction on the other side of the mountain. It proves to be quite an adventure, but because this is an exploration trip and we already got what we came for, we decide to head out. After a spectacular drive on all kinds of mud roads, even getting stuck once, we finally arrive at the junction. The area is overwhelmingly beauti-

ful, especially because the autumn colors have fully emerged in just a few days. A bit of sun does its magic and turns it into a really fantastic and beautiful landscape! We are not rewarded for our adventurous spirit fish-wise though: this spot proves to be difficult to fish at the moment.

The river is just too deep to cross with waders and the bank on which we are standing is not suitable because there are more people here; locals who, of course, also fish. We therefore decide to return via a different route and try our luck again in the afternoon around the camp.



A bit of an adventurous spirit comes in handy here!

Autumn in Mongolia...



Before we do that, I walk up the mountain next to the camp and take some beautiful overview photos. The view and the surroundings are truly breathtaking and this river is so beautiful and fishable for miles!

After the brisk walk and a short rest we decide to try our luck again where we started; the outflow of the small river into the main river near the camp. And there it happens. I cast a small jerkbait far away and it is immediately attacked. The fish misses and a large swirl reveals that we have found a large fish. Henk ties a streamer to his rod and casts into the outflow, just like I do. For a while nothing happens, but just as we both pull our bait out of the water the fish attacks again and in doing so almost lands on dry land in the mud at our feet. A huge taimen! Full of adrenaline and with shaking hands we continue fishing, will this still work? Yes! After a few casts, Henk gets a huge blow on his rod and he is in. The fish fights ferociously and has to be brought back against the current. That works and after crawling through the mud to the water I manage to get my hands under it and land the fish. What a whopper! We shout and yell and cheer. This trip couldn't end any better! The fish measures no less than 113cm! We are over the moon, despite the fact that a large hook penetrates into my arm during the ordeal – but luckily we were fishing with barbless hooks... Such a monster is exactly what we came for! A pilot trip couldn't have been more successful than this, what a



The climax to our pilot trip – perhaps you will catch an even bigger one when you join us for our next trip?



Without this perfect team, this trip would not have been possible!

fantastic ending. Davaa is also very satisfied because he has also learned a lot about what this location has to offer!

The next morning we leave the camp and drive back towards Ulaanbaatar. The past few days were very intense. Tired and full of emotions we quietly sit in the car. What a great location and what a great experience we had, here in Mongo-

lia. In Ulaanbaatar we take a nice bath to get completely clean again and head straight for the wine bar to celebrate our success. Life is beautiful. The next morning, Davaa takes us to the airport. We evaluate the pilot trip, buy fermented yak milk vodka as a souvenir and begin the return trip. We are very happy, for we can now add a great new destination to the Worldsbestfishingtrips portfolio. We will be back here! ■

## JOIN US ON THE NEWLY PLANNED TRIP IN 2024!

This pilot trip has proven that good taimen can be caught here, and also lenok trout. The location is very beautifully situated and the lodge (which has now been completed) is very modern and of high quality. The local organization is very experienced because they are part of a large travel organization in Mongolia. They are developing fishing and boating opportunities in this area (new boats with more power have already been arranged) and we have been able to support them well in this. We will therefore try to organize a so-called pioneering trip in September 2024. This type of trip is comparable to our pilot trip, but with more fishing days and also on different stretches of river, so it has even more opportunities to offer! You can now book a one-off fishing trip to this location for a greatly reduced rate and during that week we will also actively help the local organization further to develop the fishing and boating in this area.

Do you like pioneering (and a low price)? And have you always wanted to catch a taimen? Register quickly because places are limited!