

## Ice Festival on the Lake Hovsgol

The 17th edition of the Ice Festival took place on the 2nd and 3rd of March 2016 on the Lake Hovsgol, in Northern Mongolia.



View over the frozen Hovsgol lake

Every year, local people celebrate the winter, with typical Mongolian activities like horse sledge and ice skating races, shaman blessings, Mongolian wrestling competition on ice, archery and anklebone shooting. Some courageous cyclists rode a few kilometers on the lake with their bikes to join the principal site of the event.

The main attractions were 15 magnificent ice sculptures that were the subject of a competition. These creations surrounded a large stage area, where several highlights such as the traditional folk music concert by the famous opera singer Uyanga Bayanm and a show of the best traditional costume also took place. Visitors could have a rest on ice furniture in a ger entirely made of ice. Young and old had fun on the slide also made of ice. Local craftsmen sold furs and various traditional Mongolian jewelry.





Ice sculptures

All of the above mentioned activities took part on Lake Hovsgol with temperatures around -30 degrees. The 200 meters deep lake is frozen and can withstand the weight of hundreds of visitors, including horses and sledges, huge ice statues and also cars driving over the lake. It is very impressive to see the strength of the unbreakable ice and see it used as building materials.



Ger and bar made of ice

### Many gers restaurant and gers camps welcomed the visitors

Visitors could regain strength and warm up a bit in the gers, which offered traditional Mongolian tea with milk, and salt and also traditional foods composed mainly of meat. In total, 67 gers restaurants have collaborated with the restaurant set-up.



Local people in traditional costumes and Joanna

This event is not primarily a foreign tourist event; it is one of the favorite local Mongolian events and a lot of people come from the capital to enjoy the winter ice festival. Tourists are obviously welcomed to discover the unique culture of nomads and to marvel at the beautiful and remote landscapes of Mongolia. Eight tourist camps and ten guesthouses along the lake welcomed the tourists and Mongolian citizens in their facilities. To join the festival site, participants had to drive on the frozen lake to the event site.



Local craftsmen selling traditional handicrafts

You can fly from the capital Ulaanbaatar, but the cheaper way is to come by car. Once in the car, the Mongolian adventure begins. There is only one paved road connecting the capital to the north. And this road is really bumpy and could be closed anytime by a snowstorm. During the 12-hour drive to the Hovsgol area from Ulaanbaatar, you have plenty of time to observe the beautiful Mongolian landscapes, sometimes passing a few herds of yaks and cows. And it is important to stay attentive not to miss the few small shops and gas stations along the road.



Local people enjoying the ice festival



Joanna with some young men wearing the traditional deel

### Politicians supporting the ecoLeap Foundation

In total, about 8,000 Mongolian and 80 foreign tourists in 1,200 cars braved the cold to come to the Ice Festival. ecoLeap foundation participated and encouraged waste collection among the visitors. 1,000 garbage bags and brochures were distributed encouraging people to collect the garbage in the supplied bags. At the end of the festival our truck and driver Bayaraa collected all the garbage and ensured that it was brought out of the park to the landfill.

The garbage bag placed in a bin made out of ice



Shuree with mr. Bayaraa the garbage truck driver

ecoLeap foundation took the opportunity of the presence of the President of Mongolia Mr. Elbegdorj Tsakhia and his staff. Our Ms. Shuree Sukhbaatar presented our projects and in particular the garbage bags distribution and our waste management to Adviser of Minister of the Environment Mr. Tsolmon and parliament members Davaasuren and Enkh-Amgalan both elected from Hovsgol Province, who were very enthusiastic and complemented our work in the national park.



Adviser to the Minister of Environment Mr. Tsolmon



Parliament member Mr. Davaasuren



Opera singer Uyanga Bayanm and Shuree



Parliament Member Mr. Enkh-Amgalan