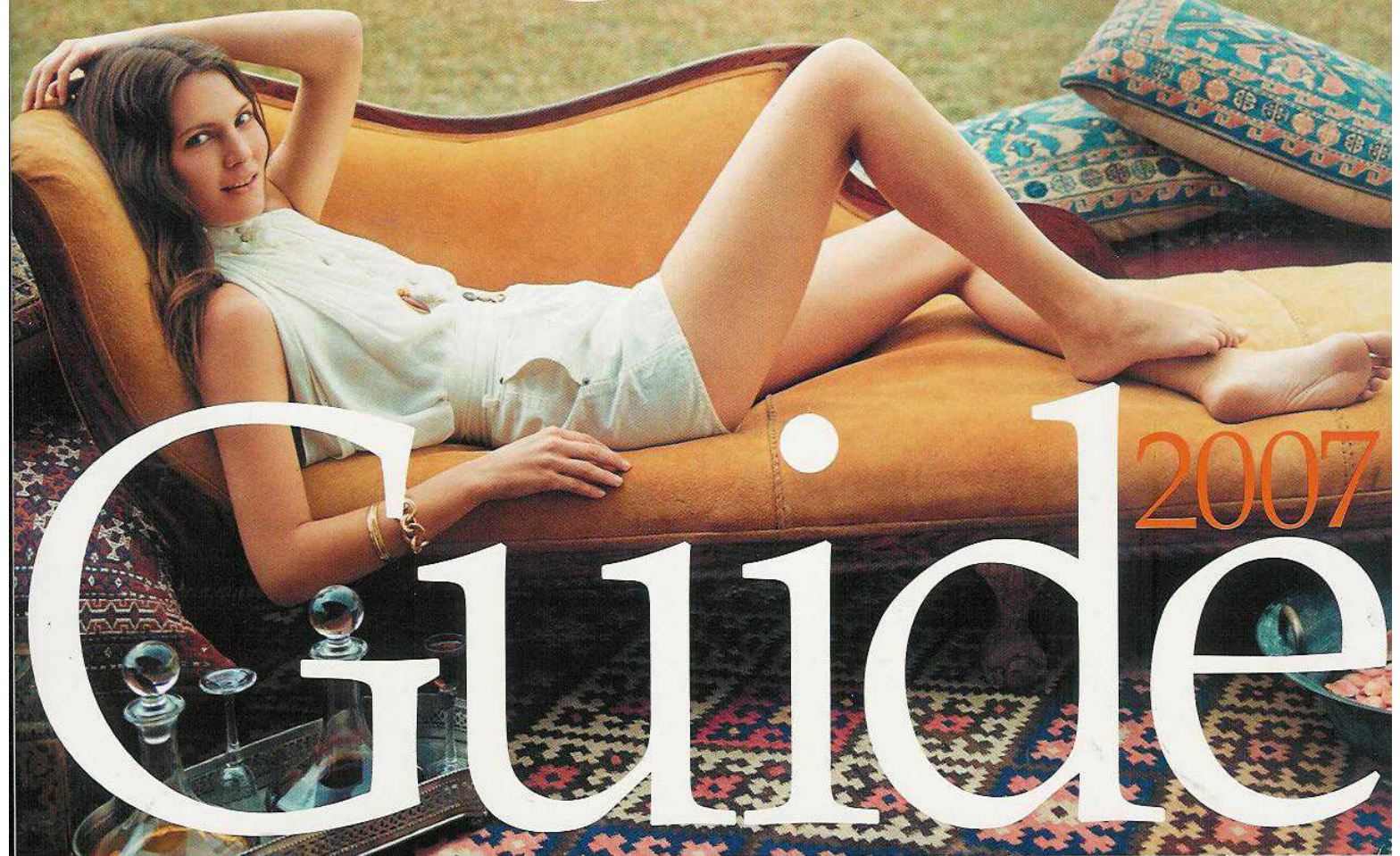


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Travel



Guide

2007

Trend report
Wilderness

Alaska

North America's last true wilderness is an intoxicating mystery – a place where midnight suns bask over a massive, uninhabited void, endlessly locked in winter. This ancient, frozen otherworld is remarkably unexplored. Concerned only with basic survival, the original natives stayed along the

outer reaches, scarcely venturing into the periphery. The Gold Rush of the late 1800s saw a small migration. Now people come, not for gold, but for the state's haunting beauty. Head straight for Uluksuk, Thule, mythically revealed as 'a land remote beyond reckoning', engulfed within the 13.2 million-acre Wrangell-St Elias National Park, itself within North

America's largest protected landmass. Step into a bush plane at Chitina airport, fly over towering mountains, lush valleys and endless glaciers, and land at the lodge 45 minutes later – 100 miles from the end of the road and 50 miles from other human life. Here, under the wing of famous bush pilots Paul and Donna Claus, you can go flight-seeing over ice fields and lakes, and land on glaciers where no one has been before. Venture deep into the undisturbed world of wild beasts – grizzly bears, moose and coyotes – most of which have never seen people. Comfort-camp in the wild, listening to the sound of ice cracking all around. Gargantuan rocks, big seas, vast skies and perpetual twilight all do the heart-stopping trick. **UK reservations** Ultima Thule Outfitters (tel: 001 907 688 1200; ultimathulelodge.com).

the moment, there are no flights here, but it's going to be mega – great for viewing elephants and whales and totally wild.'

In South America the hip Explora Hotel concept (masterly design, comfort and exploration in inhospitable places – visit explora.com) has recently been hosting trips into the wilds of Bolivia and Argentina, immersing guests in some dramatic landscapes, from extraterrestrial salt flats to monstrous Patagonian glaciers. The new hotshot operator in this area, Blue Parallel (blueparallel.com), offers short, week-long taster excursions to these more daring South American destinations. Even Gordon Campbell Gray, proprietor of London's slick *One Aldwych*, is considering opening a

grazing the animals. We'll have to move again in a month, if the weather gets dry, so that we can be close to a river.'

Standing over a large barrel in the corner, a young girl ferments mare's milk, stirring it slowly with a wooden pole. This airag is the favoured drink of Mongolians. A bowl is passed around in a clockwise direction; westerners may be glad to pass it on, so bitter is it to the uninitiated. The father pours vodka into a bowl; he dips his ring finger into the liquid, touches it to his forehead and flicks it to the sky as an offering to the spirits. Bringing out the family photo album, he points to a picture of himself on horseback, with two slain marmots slung over the saddle behind him. As vodka freely flows, we

monstrous Patagonian glaciers. The new hotshot operator in this area, Blue Parallel (blueparallel.com), offers short, week-long taster excursions to these more daring South American destinations. Even Gordon

the prized frontiers they deliver.

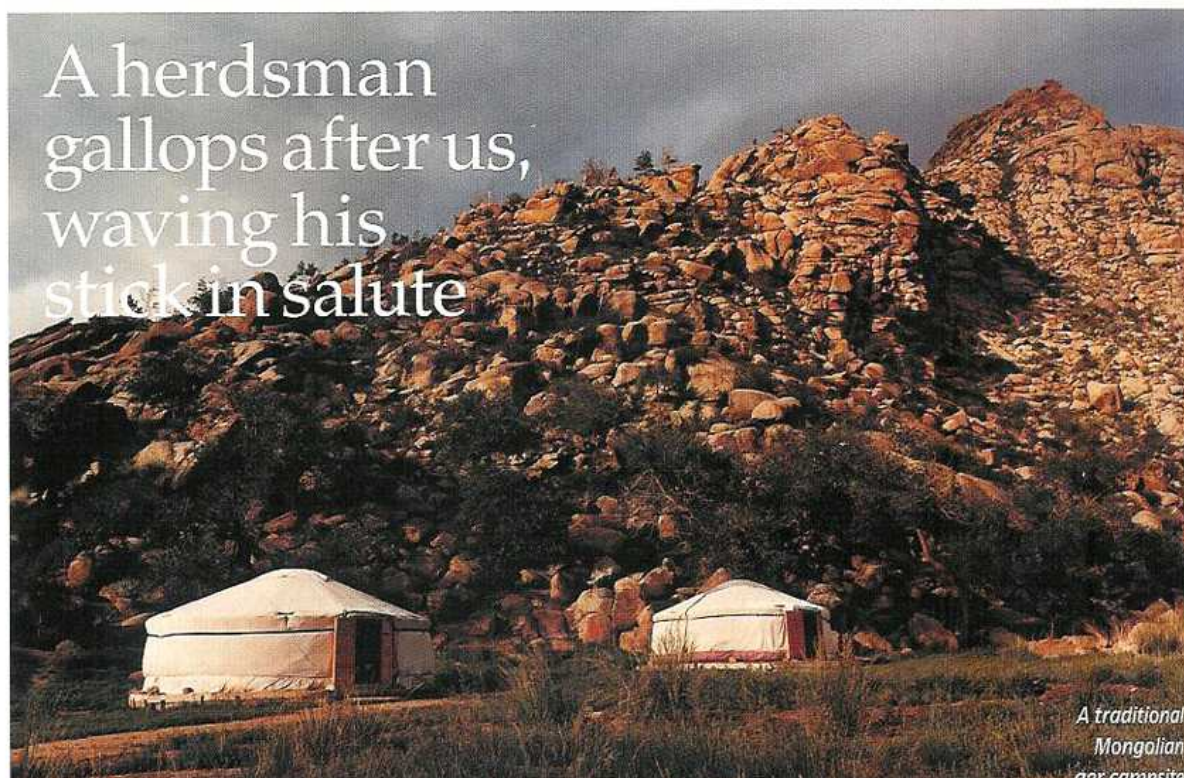
Back in Mongolia, we sit inside a family ger as a weathered woman cheerily prepares us a late lunch of freshly sliced beef wrapped in intricate pastry parcels. She is draped in a long velvet robe and her cheeks are an idiosyncratic Mongol cherry-brown.

'We've been camped here for two days,' she says, getting up to poke the fire in the wood-burning stove. 'It's a good spot for

turn a smoky blue as thunder rumbles and clouds bruise. Escaping grassy scrub, we reach crisp dunes and gallop on.

UK reservations Panoramic Journeys (tel: 01608 811183; panoramicjourneys.com).

Rates From £1,290 a person for a bespoke 10-day trip, excluding flights. Air China (tel: 020 7744 0800; air-china.co.uk) flies from London Heathrow to Mongolia Ulan Bator via Beijing from £582 return. □



A herdsman gallops after us, waving his stick in salute

A traditional Mongolian ger campsite