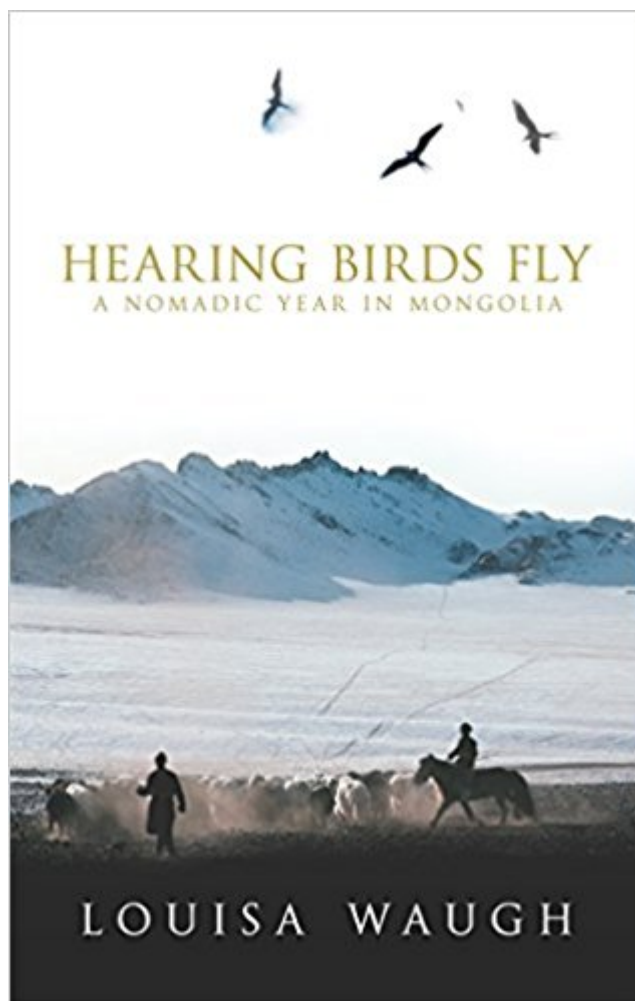


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# Hearing Birds Fly



## Synopsis

HEARING BIRDS FLY is Louisa Waugh's passionately written account of her time in a remote Mongolian village. Frustrated by the increasingly bland character of the capital city of Ulan Bator, she yearned for the real Mongolia and got the chance when she was summoned by the village head to go to Tsengel far away in the west, near the Kazakh border. Her story completely transports the reader to feel the glacial cold and to see the wonders of the Seven Kings as they steadily emerge from the horizon. Through her we sense their trials as well as their joys, rivalries and even hostilities, many of which the author shared or knew about. Her time in the village was marked by coming to terms with the harshness of climate and also by how she faced up to new feelings towards the treatment of animals, death, solitude and real loneliness, and the constant struggle to censor her reactions as an outsider. Above all, Louisa Waugh involves us with the locals' lives in such a way that we come to know them and care for their fates.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An elegy to a remarkable part of the world. •SUNDAY TIMES With a skill and art quite extraordinary for a first book ... the reader is drawn into the world she describes through the warmth of her friendships and the sympathy and generosity with which she treats all aspects of her subject. I put the book down finally with a sense of absolute satisfaction, having spent the last few hours beneath the spell of a writer of real integrity and power •Chris Stewart Waugh has captured the starkly beautiful landscapes in restrained descriptive passages, but the most fascinating aspect of her narrative is her portrayal of the villagers and the nomads she meets higher up the mountains...

HEARING BIRDS FLY is an extraordinary •OBSERVERHer great strength is telling the villagers' stories, which she does with an engaging blend of charm, directness, humour and awe at the power of nature... It is a mark of Waugh's success that the romantic terra incognita she describes, helped by unsentimental •TLS

After two years of working in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, journalist Louisa Waugh moved to the remote village of Tsengel, in the extreme west of the country. This is the story of the year she spent there, living and working with the people who have made a home in the stark but beautiful landscape. With unflinching honesty, Waugh recounts how she slowly learned to fend for herself in a world where life is dominated by the seasons. The villagers and their culture vividly emerge as she shares her happiness, frustrations, and occasional extreme loneliness and fear. *Hearing Birds Fly* transports the reader from the end of a long, hard Mongolian winter, through a droughted "stricken spring, into a lush summer spent in the mountains with a family of nomads. A warm, totally unsentimental account of life in a world where the act of survival is, in itself, a triumph of the human spirit.

British teacher Louisa Waugh one day decides she needs to break out of her mundane London life, and accepts an invitation to spend a year teaching the children of the outer Mongolian plains. Leaving her materialistic world of computers, Ipods, cell phones and espresso machines behind, Louisa eagerly anticipates a unique experience as she lands in Mongolia's capital city of Ulaanbaatar. She first spends a few months getting her feet wet and her body acclimatized in this city, making friends and learning the language before flying out to the steppe, the arid sparse desert-like terrain of the village of Tsengel. Arriving with just a few backpacks of personal items, Louisa is quickly & surprisingly welcomed into the family fold of some of the most generous, kind, and happy people that exist on this planet. This is the 4th book I've read about the warm and jovial Mongolian people, and it remains consistent through all that I've read about them, that they love all visitors to their land, and believe in sharing and caring for anyone that shows up knocking at their door. Minutes after her arrival she is welcomed with open arms by the town priest, and shown to her own ger, a nomadic canvas tent that might not look like much on the outside, but can be lavishly decorated with thick carpets, comfy furniture and a warm stove for heating and cooking on the inside. Unpacking her meager belongings of a few changes of clothes, cases of toilet paper, stacks of books and emergency medicine, Louisa falls in love with these smiling practical people who literally live day by day in survival mode with next to nothing to call their own, yet spend each night

laughing, cooking, eating and drinking after their daily chores are done. Every act of daily life is spent working together, all efforts a joint teamwork experience. In some ways, while reading of Louisa's stay in Tsengel, the life style reminded me of the communal Amish experience. Life is harsh on the Mongolian plains, the men are hard working shepherds that prize their flocks of sheep, goats, camels and horses; their only means of survival for food, drink, and warm clothing. Louisa's stomach rebels on a diet of mutton, horsemeat, marmot and butter salted tea, and finds the weekly slaughter of animals a heart-wrenching affair that causes her much turmoil. Weather is severe, frigid winters have you up at dawn to crack the ice in your buckets to get water to drink, no running faucets here. Trench-style outhouses for bathrooms slick with ice can have you skating to the loo in the middle of the night to pee, and skinning marmot pelts and sheering sheep for cashmere and felt are back breaking jobs when it's below zero and one hasn't much food or sustenance to keep the body fat and warm. The luxury of electricity is absent, only a few community buildings are wired for it, and even then it is only turned on between 6 and 9PM in the winter hours. This is a land without luxury yet Louisa finds it appealing. Reading and teaching by candlelight and woodstove fires are the norm, as Louisa spends her year learning the gifts of love, friendship and family. She finds the joys of solitude and calmness amidst people that come to love her as their own. Birthing babies, burying the dead, battling bubonic plague, birthday celebrations & weddings rituals, weekend jaunts to the disco, and learning how to distill vodka are just some of the thrills of the Mongolian nomad life. Observing the sport of hunting with eagles while horseback riding in the mountains has Louisa enthralled with this precious country and wondering if she will ever be able to return to the hustle and bustle of London, when all she wants to do is sit on the Mongolian plain where it is so quiet you can hear the birds fly. This a sensational memoir of a courageous woman with the spirit of adventure as she learns how spoiled, greedy and closed minded most of the world is, and how she became a new woman with a whole new attitude on life after spending the best year of her life in another world on the other side of the globe.

I actually bought this book for a friend who was moving to Mongolia, and somehow kept forgetting to give it to her, so I decided to read it myself, and loved it! I really had no interest in Mongolia or travel narratives before reading this book, and it opened up a new world of reading and interests for me. It is very well written, almost poetic at times in the author's description of the places and people she introduces. It was one of those books that left me wanting more when it was finished. I found myself wondering what became of the people in the story and the author. Highly recommend.

Good 1st person account of a year spent in the outskirts of Outer Mongolia. The author took a year long assignment as an English teacher and writes about her time there, not just from a personal perspective, but also from the point-of-view of the Mongolians. It's almost part memoir, part travelogue. Great book!

Short of going to Mongolia and living with a nomadic family for a year, this book is the best way to learn about life in one of the world's harshest environments. Reading this gave me an appreciation for so many things that I take for granted on a daily basis--heat, electricity, and being able to eat more than mutton on any given day. The unique aspects of Mongolian life are also touched on with humor and adventure, including hunting with golden eagles and the Naadam festival wrestling tournaments. Louisa Waugh has a great writing style--lyrical, but she doesn't waste words. It's rare that a memoir is a page-turner, but this one kept me up until the wee hours of the morning.

Because I'm interested in the history of the nomadic Turks of Central Asia, Mongolia, and eastern Russia, I had hoped for more on nomadic life and especially the author's experience of Kazakh culture. Instead, she focuses primarily on modern Mongolia, as experienced during her year in Mongolia's westernmost village. Even so, the writing is beautiful, the observations gritty and unique, and the author's outlook wonderfully balanced (few stereotypes here). A book well worth reading!

I couldn't put the book down. Wonderful insight into Mongolia's nomadic life.

Loved her adventures! Read this before going to Mongolia in 2014. Of course my experience in Ulanbaatar and with an inexpensive tour company was totally different, but at least I had a clue. The way she describes her encounters with the culture is respectful and helpful.

This memoir is a great read. The author tells her story in a way that keeps your interest and at the same time, I don't want the book to end. I bought the book because it is about Mongolia - a place I plan to visit next year; and it's written by a woman, and helps convey what it's like to experience the country as a woman; the interactions and friendships able to make; and the extent to which a woman can move about freely and safely.

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