

A Bataar way of life

In the next instalment of her travelogue, film maker *Ghislaine Heger* heads to the bleak, but beautiful, landscapes of Mongolia to witness shamanic ceremonies

FROM MONGLIA WITH LOVE: A shot of the beautiful local area

Having visited Siberia and witnessed the shamanic ceremonies at lake Baikal, it was now time for me to fly to Mongolia to meet the shamans in Ulan Bataar, a city unlike anything I'd ever seen, where the ancient civilisation mingled with the new, with some traditions upheld and others having been lost during the communist era. They still had, for instance, what are called ovoos – piles of stones at a sacred place where one must circle around three times, clockwise, to show respect

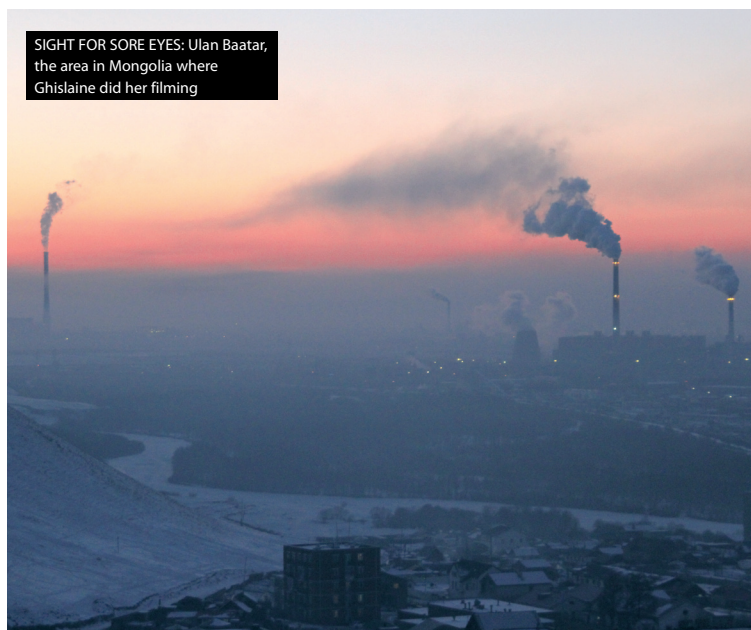
to the spirits said to still inhabit the site.

I was accompanied on my trip by a sound engineer, and was hoping to film the first shots for my film about shamans. Most of the ones we met were really young, and we were surprised they could already practice. They never ask for money though – everyone gives whatever they want, or can afford. The first one we recorded, Tselmeg, was still living with her family in a small apartment in the centre of the city. They all welcomed us as if we were

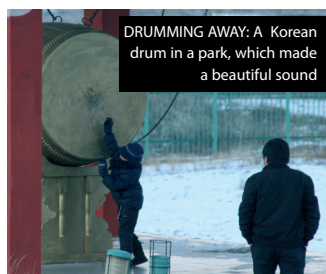
the most precious guests.

She and the other few shamans we later met could become very angry while possessed, and it made a strange impression on us. I wasn't so much questioning whether or not they were really possessed, but interested in discovering how. I believe there are several levels in the spiritual world and, depending on which frequency the shaman is connected to on Earth, he or she will attract the same kind of frequency in Spirit.

SIGHT FOR SORE EYES: Ulan Baatar, the area in Mongolia where Ghislaine did her filming



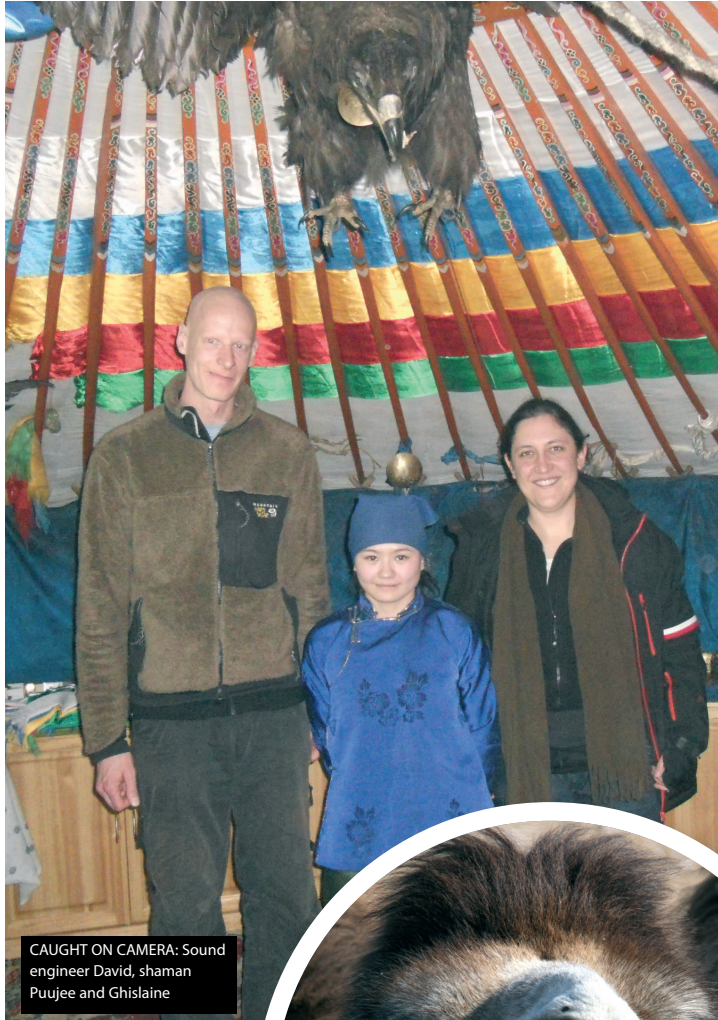
DRUMMING AWAY: A Korean drum in a park, which made a beautiful sound



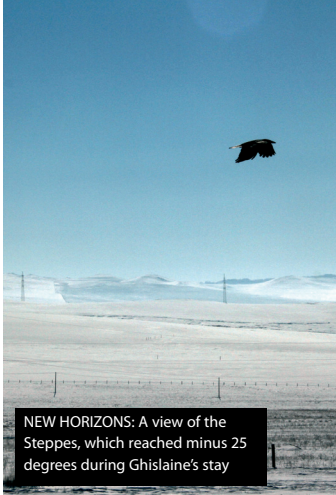
LAST MAN STANDING: One of the many ovoos, symbolising the spirits at certain sites



SPECTACULAR VIEWS: Many of the properties in the area are divided into squares, as seen here



CAUGHT ON CAMERA: Sound engineer David, shaman Puujee and Ghislaine



NEW HORIZONS: A view of the Steppes, which reached minus 25 degrees during Ghislaine's stay



NEW FRIENDS: Tselmeg was the first shaman recorded in a trance on camera



ROCK OF AGES: One of the beautiful mountainous sites an hour out of Ulan Bataar



Ger-reat expectations

None, though, were as powerful as Puujee. Tiny and quiet, she must have been around 25-years old. But once she got into a trance, she was no longer a fragile little thing: she was possessed by an old man and woman, alternately, the former being a grandfather spirit called Sodnomnorov. We couldn't see her face throughout, but her voice changed completely. Before it was our turn to converse with the spirit, we had to wait for two hours, on uncomfortable chairs, while all the local people asked their questions. David, the sound engineer who was witnessing a shamanic ceremony for the first time, was a bit frustrated but, once we were allowed to come close to the possessed Puujee, it was an amazing experience. With the help of a translator, we discovered that Sodnomnorov came from another time, probably the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th. He was very interested in knowing what it looked like where we came from. He mainly talked to David because he's very tall and bold. He said a few things about David's ancestors on his

father's side. I was happy not to be the centre of the attention, so I could observe what was going on. There was something in the atmosphere, not only because of the fact we were in a ger (yurt), but also a general feeling I had with that shaman in particular. Something really strong happened the second time we visited; she spread a completely unconditional love around her, and I knew I wanted her to be in my film. Unfortunately, she only agreed to be recorded just as we were due to leave. I promised to return but, sadly, didn't get the finance for the film (I'm still hopeful).

Back home in Switzerland, I was doubting, and reconsidering, the whole project – it was a lot to handle, not only financially and technically, but emotionally. But I've decided not to give up, and have changed my plan to next visit Indonesia. I have no doubt I will be guided to what will I need to experience there. My guides have always shown me the way.



EVERYDAY LIFE: Many of the locals wear heavy, thick coats like these

"She was no longer a fragile little thing: she was possessed by an old man and woman, alternately, the former being a grandfather spirit called Sodnomnorov"



TRAVEL TALES

To find out more about Ghislaine's adventures and her film about the shamans, email her at ghis.heger@gmail.com.