

MONGOLIA SUNRISE TO SUNSET

In a week-long event held by the shores of an ancient Mongolian lake, runners find themselves in a quiet landscape of jagged mountains, swaying grasslands, and larch forests. And before and after the run there are numerous opportunities to experience traditional Mongolian-style living.

Every August, 100 runners from around the world limber up by the shores of Lake Hovsgol in northern Mongolia to participate in the Mongolia Sunrise to Sunset (MS2S) trail run. The race winds through one of the world's most untouched national parks and tests runners' endurance with a terrain that ranges from horse trails to 4WD tracks and craggy mountain passes. MS2S is widely considered to be one of the most beautiful trail runs on the planet.

Hovsgol National Park lies close to the Siberian border, where the central steppe of Mongolia meets the Siberian taiga. The biodiversity here is impressive and participants encounter a rich, largely unblemished landscape that moves from lakeside meadows and mossy forests to windblown lowlands covered with swathes of wildflowers and lush green hills. Held annually since 1999, MS2S is one of Asia's oldest ultra trail runs and is suitable for runners of all abilities: ►





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Heading north from Camp Toilogt, the event course starts as a single track that skirts the lakeshore and passes through woods and over lowlands, before rising some 700 meters (2,300 feet) into the mountains. For each stage of the route, runners are watched over by Mongolian horsemen, who serve as race marshals.

► the event offers distances set at 42 kilometers (26 miles) and 100 kilometers (62 miles). With both distances having a cut-off time of 18 hours—literally from sunrise to sunset—the marathon distance can be hiked by those wanting to go at a more leisurely pace. Even so, with accumulative elevation gains/losses in the marathon distance of 2,255 meters (7,400 feet), and 3,365 meters (11,040 feet) in the ultra run, the course is challenging by any standard. Finishing the marathon distance is certainly manageable for those with decent hill fitness, but attempting the longer route requires much more serious training.

For many participants, this event is not simply about taking part in the race but rather, the wider experience that's on offer. Everyone who signs up enjoys a full week in the Mongolian wilderness, living in a traditional ger, or yurt, camp beside Lake Hovsgol, known locally as the blue pearl of Mongolia. Here, they have the opportunity to explore the raw beauty of the surrounding countryside and get a taste of the culture of the region's nomadic population as they watch herders go about their day with their sheep, reindeer, goats, yaks, and horses. The more adventurous can choose to take part in a host of activities that are on offer during the days leading

up to, and following, the race, from horse riding and kayaking to fishing and mountain biking.

What is particularly appealing about the MS2S is the philosophy of its organizers. The event is run as a nonprofit and all proceeds are donated to the Geneva-based ecoLeap foundation. In turn, ecoLeap sponsors the development of Hovsgol National Park as a sustainable tourist destination and operates a number of programs that protect the region environmentally to ensure the park remains as pristine and beautiful as it has been for millennia and to support its nomadic inhabitants so they can continue to follow their unique way of life for years to come. ■

Length: 42 km or 100 km (26 or 62 mi)

Location: Hovsgol National Park, Mongolia

Date: August

Type: trail

Temperature Ø: 10–22 °C (50–72 °F)





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Participants in the race through this vast Mongolian landscape are treated to stunning flora and fauna at every turn. They might also encounter members of nomadic tribes living simply from the land, as they have done for generations.