

Precious Wetland in a Sea of Grass: Uvs Lake Basin

Global region

Central/East Asia

Domestic region

Northwest Mongolia/Southern Siberia, Russia

Internationally Designated Areas

Uvs Nuur Basin Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (Mongolia/Russia)

2022

- Uvs Lake Basin UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (Mongolia)
1997
- Ubsunorskaya Kotlovina UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (Russia)
1997

Uvs Nuur Basin Transnational World Heritage Site (Mongolia/Russia)

2003

Lake Uvs and its surrounding wetlands Ramsar Wetland

2004

Perched on the border of the Russian Federation, Uvs Lake is Mongolia's largest lake, stretching across 335,000 ha and framed by the semi-arid foothills of the southern Altay Mountains. Once part of an ancient ocean, this saline lake now lies in a shallow flat basin, averaging just six meters deep.

Although relatively shallow, this is a landscape of striking extremes, with temperatures ranging from -50 °C in winter to +40 °C in summer and gentle foothills rising to the peaks of the Türgen Mountains. Scattered smaller lakes, reedbeds, and river deltas provide critical nesting and resting sites for 215 migratory waterfowl species, while the uplands shelter Argali sheep, snow leopards, and Altay ibex.

Pristine preservation of culture and nature

Nomadic pastoralists have protected the landscapes around Uvs Lake for centuries. Songs, legends, and Indigenous knowledge are part of a living tapestry of culture, spirituality, and survival.

This heritage also takes material form, such as the ancient sacred cairns, known as ovoos, that dot the hills, and the burial mounds that date back further than the Egyptian pyramids. Carvings, stone sculptures, and remnants of medieval settlements and Buddhist temples speak of generations who have lived in harmony with this timeless land.

Biological riches and global prestige

The Uvs Lake region is a tapestry of habitats, including desert, steppe, forests, wetlands, salt and freshwater systems, mobile and fixed dunes, and even tundra. As well as biodiversity, this variety of landscapes and habitats has led to international recognition.

In 2022, the Uvs Nuur Basin Transboundary Biosphere Reserve was created by uniting Mongolia's Uvs Lake Basin with Russia's Ubsunorskaya Kotlovina, both of which were originally

designated in 1997. A transnational UNESCO World Heritage Site, spanning seven Mongolian and five Russian components, was then designated in 2003 for its immense cultural and ecological values

The lake's reedbeds and deltas, vital for endangered waterbirds such as the white-headed duck and swan goose, also earned Ramsar Wetland status in 2004.

Local leadership to safeguard heritage

Indigenous pastoralists continue traditional livelihoods while managing community-run tourist camps as part of sustainable tourism initiatives in this MIDA. These eco-certified camps blend modern accommodations with traditional Mongol tents, offering local cuisine and hands-on experiences in nomadic customs.

Integrating conservation and development, visitors to this MIDA can connect with wetlands, mountains, and culture while supporting the traditions of the people who call these landscapes home.

Uvs Lake is a living heritage, a refuge for wildlife, and a landscape shaped by generations of nomads. Culture, ecology, and sustainable tourism converge through wise stewardship to preserve one of Central Asia's most extraordinary regions.