

# Big Skies Horse Trail with Naadam Games, 9 – 21 July, Mongolia

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## Itinerary

### 9 July - Ulaanbaatar

During the Naadam Games in Ulaanbaatar it will feel as if the entire population of Mongolia is in the city. The itinerary must be flexible to accommodate any changes in the Naadam programmes or changes of restricted areas. You must not expect everything to run precisely to time in this hectic environment.

Today you may explore the city on your own.

A local guide who speaks both English and Mongolian will accompany the group. Such is the bustling nature of the Games that it will be impossible for your guide to provide a running commentary. Instead they will be available to answer direct questions and escort you between the venues.

This is a time when the Mongolian government invites VIPs and other official guests to the city so accommodation and transport is in short supply. Overbooking of hotels is likely but our partners in Mongolia have the experience of Naadam every year and know how to anticipate the problems. Nevertheless it is important that you appreciate that the itinerary must be flexible.

The minor archery competitions and training may have started already today. There are different styles such as children's archery, Buryat style archery etc. Training sessions allow for good photography since you can get closer and there are fewer people.



In the evening the horse trainers move their horses with their mobile camps near to the city, and pitch camp at the steppe area at Hui Doloon Hudag, 60km away from the city and Sukhbaatar Square.

You will meet other guests for a festive welcome dinner.

Overnight Ulaanbaatar

### 10 July – Ulaanbaatar

Today is a full day at the Naadam horse racing. Mongol horse racing is part of a living cultural heritage, similar to the equestrian tradition that brought the Mongol armies to faraway places during medieval times.



There are horse races at Hui Doloon Hudag, but also at several locations about 60 – 90km from the city. In the rural Naadam you will see the horse races at closer quarters, and have the added benefit of getting close to the wrestling.

Overnight Ulaanbaatar

### 11 July – Ulaanbaatar

In the morning, Naadam is opened officially by the President of Mongolia. Soldiers on horseback, sometimes dressed in Genghis Khan warrior regalia, will bring the nine white horsetail banners. They will get the banners at the Parliament where they are normally displayed and will then ride in procession through the city, later to be placed in the centre of the Stadium, from where you will be viewing the Opening Ceremony.



The first round of wrestling will start immediately thereafter. Usually 512 wrestlers from all across Mongolia will compete in the first round! But sometimes more than 700!

No judges, no time limits and no weight limits!

Later there may be an opportunity see the archery competitions (if not done the previous day) and later go out to the steppes area on the fringes of the city.

Here you can visit the nomadic tented camps that have sprung up, and experience a concentration of nomadic Mongolia all at one place. Herdsmen will have come with their horses and all the necessary provisions for their festivities, which include airag (koumiss, fermented mares milk) for the merry making.



Stroll around the area and you are likely to be invited in somewhere. You may also try your luck seeing the finals of the horse races, but prior instructions are necessary since the approach of several hundred racing horses is potentially hazardous.

Overnight Ulaanbaatar



### 12 July - To Bosog Meadows

Today is the first day of the Big Skies Horse Trail. This journey on horseback is a trail ride with the comfort of staying each night in a ger (yurt) in a made-up cot bed with the ger warmed by a stove.

The trail is supported throughout by yak carts, which take your luggage and move the gers every two days to a new camp.



The following is the outline itinerary but please note that the day by day itinerary may vary due to local conditions, but always with your best interests in mind. For operational reasons the trip may run in reverse. The horse trail will take you over the southern fringes of the Khan Khentii, the scenic mountain forest taiga of Gorkhi Terej National Park.

This morning you may visit the Gandan lamasery, centre of the Buddhist revival in Mongolia. The Mongols follow the Tibetan version of Lamaism, the Dalai Lama being the theological leader.

Later you depart the city, and gradually the Mongolian landscape unfolds before your eyes. By the time you come to the Hadan Hoshuu steppes valley, there are no traces of civilization. Another world exists here as the nomads with their horses, gers and livestock make use of the summer pasture.



Have a picnic lunch en route and continue your journey across the forested Zamtiin Pass and into the Upper Tuul River Valley until you reach your camp at Bosog Meadows, beside the Tuul River. You will spend two nights in this camp.

#### **13 July - Bosog Meadows**

This morning you meet the horses and your horse guides. Your first day ride takes you on the southern side of the Tuul River, up the valleys and through forests, onto the ridges with stunning panoramic views of the southernmost Siberian forests.



This is a great time to get to know the horses that will carry you over the next few days. Return to Bosog Meadows for a second night.

#### **14 & 15 July - Baruunbayan Valley**

In the morning the entire camp is packed up and loaded onto the yak carts. You ride north toward the Hentii Mountains, across the forested ridge into the next valley, the Baruunbayan. You separate from the yak carts to ride a scenic route to camp by the Baruunbayan River for two nights.



The next day a full day's ride takes you to Gunjin Sum, a ruined temple hidden in the forest. Return to camp for a second night.

#### **16 & 17 July - Zuunbayan Valley**

For the final time, camp is packed up onto the yak carts and you ride along with them for a while. Again



you then separate from the yak carts to ride up the partly forested ridges. Most of the trees are larch, however on some of the ridges there are larger patches of pine and there is a real possibility to come across the rare Black-billed Capercaillie and the more common Black Grouse. Finally arrive at your ger camp, next to the Zuunbayan River, a tributary of the Tuul River.



You spend two nights at this camp and have a day riding up towards the tree line of the Hentii Mountains, with spectacular scenery and views in all directions.

#### **18 July - To Jalman Meadows**

Today you say goodbye to the herders and their yak carts since you will be staying at a semi-permanent ger camp at Jalman Meadows. You ride back to the Sharlburg Valley crossing the uppermost parts of the Tuul River before reaching Jalman Meadows. Stay overnight in the ger camp for two nights.



#### **19 July - Jalman Meadows**

You have a full day to enjoy the setting of Jalman Meadows Ger Camp. If you wish, you may use the day for an additional half or full day ride.



Alternatively you may prefer to spend time relaxing in the ger library with books on Genghis Khan and contemporary Mongolia; or with a riverside sauna. It is also possible to replace the ride with a raft float downstream.

#### **20 July - To Ulaanbaatar**

Return to Ulaanbaatar and check into the hotel. There should be time this afternoon to see the capital city on your own. Distances in the city are short and the local guide is on standby depending on what you are interested in. Lunch is to your own account today. Overnight at the hotel.



#### **21 July - Departure**

You will be transferred from your hotel to the airport for your flight home, or to continue your holiday in Mongolia.

## **Accommodation**

On the Big Skies Trail you stay in a spacious ger on a made up cot bed, with a stove for warmth on cold nights. Most camps will be by the side of a river, with hot showers available every night.



Meals will be a mixture of both Mongolian and Western cuisine. Vegetarians can be catered for with advance warning.

You dine at a table and will be pleasantly surprised at the meals your cooks can prepare for you.

The ger is the practical and typical Mongolian dwelling. (The word “yurt”, is in fact a Turkish word, but also used in many countries to describe the ger). Four people assemble a ger within half an hour.



Once constructed, the wooden frame of the latticework and roof poles, surrounded with layers of felt and canvas, keeps the ger warm inside, even during the harsh Mongolian winter. A stove is usually placed in the middle, particularly welcome early and late in the season.

A kitchen ger is also erected and is for everyone to use. On cold or wet evenings you will eat in the ger and, although it may be crowded when the team also come to eat, you should stay on and use this opportunity to get to know the whole team and have fun practising your Mongolian.



During the Naadam Games, accommodation is in a hotel in Ulaanbaatar in a twin room with private bathroom or at a ger camp in Bogd Khan Mountain Biosphere Reserve. The accommodation is not specified until a few weeks prior to the start of the tour. A single supplement applies if you are in a room on your own. On the Naadam Games programme all meals are included in Ulaanbaatar.