

Big Skies Horse Trail, Mongolia

This journey on horseback is a close encounter with Mongolian horsemen and their horses, a nomadic people who to date have survived the modern pressures and lifestyles. There is no other nation in the world that so much depends on horses. The Mongol horsemanship is famous and strikingly different to anything else. The herders keep their horses in a semi-wild condition, allowing them to live freely in harem groups. During the harsh winter in subzero temperatures, the horses are able to fend for themselves and protect their foals against predators such as wolves. There are no fences or any stables anywhere.

This horse trail will take you over the southern fringes of the Khan Khentii, the scenic mountain forest taiga of Gorkhi Terelj National Park.

The trail is supported throughout by yak carts, which take your luggage and the gers from camp to camp.

Itinerary

Day One: Ulaanbaatar

You are met on arrival at Ulaanbaatar and transferred to your hotel. Meet your guide and rest of the group for ride briefing over dinner. If there are late flight arrivals, the briefing will take place in the morning over breakfast.

Please note that the itinerary may vary due to local conditions, but always with your best interests in mind. For operational reasons the trip may run in reverse.

Day Two: to Bosog Meadows

In the 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.



After a picnic lunch, 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.

Day Three: 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.



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.

Days Four & Five: Baruunbayan Valley

In the morning the entire camp is packed up and loaded onto the yak carts.



You ride north toward the Khentii 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.



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.

Days Six & Seven: 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 Khentii Mountains, with spectacular scenery and views in all directions.

Day Eight: to Jalman Meadows

Today you say goodbye to the herders and their yak carts. You ride back to the Sharlborg Valley crossing the uppermost parts of the Tuul River before reaching the small ger camp at Jalman Meadows.



Day Nine: Jalman Meadows

A full day to enjoy the setting of Jalman Meadows Ger Camp. You can choose this day to do a full or half day ride. Alternatively you may prefer to relax 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.



Day Ten: to Ulaanbaatar

During the morning you return back to Ulaanbaatar giving you chance to explore the capital city on your own. Lunch is to your own account. The local guide is available to direct you to where the points of interest are located.



In the evening you have a farewell dinner and attend a performance featuring folk and traditional Mongolian music, song, dance and contortion. Overnight at the hotel.



Day Eleven: Departure

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

Accommodation and Meals

On the Big Skies Trail you stay in a spacious ger on a made up 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.



The kitchen ger 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.