

Gobi Steppe Ride, Mongolia

Location

A horseback journey across the Mongolian steppe land is an experience not available anywhere else on earth. Steppe habitats once made up twenty five percent of the global land area. Today the pampas, the puszta, the prairies and the Ukraine have largely been developed for agricultural output. Only the Mongolian steppes have survived. The high elevation of Mongolia creates unusually clear air, all the year round. It is an overwhelming visual experience of emptiness and vastness to ride across the completely silent treeless steppes.

Itinerary

Day One: Ulaanbaatar

You are met on arrival at Ulaanbaatar and transferred to your hotel. Meet your guide and rest of the group 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 Tseel

After breakfast you visit the Gandan Monastery, the centre of the revival of Buddhist Lamaism in Mongolia. Later drive south out of the city, with a picnic lunch on the grasslands, before continuing across the steppe to

Tseel. Your nomad hosts will meet you at Tseel and introduce you to the horses. There should be time for an introductory ride before dinner. Overnight in tents here for two nights.



In the days to follow on the trail, your luggage will be loaded upon traditional wooden carts pulled by bactrian camels.



Day Three: to Hoyd Önjuul

Today you ride west to the mountains of Hoyd Önjuul. In the surrounding area it is often possible to spot herds of Mongolian Gazelles also known as the White-tailed Gazelle. With luck you may even see the Black-tailed Goitred Gazelle, which is better adapted to the arid environment you are riding in; the transition zone of grasslands and desert steppes. In the mountain area Red Deer are sometimes seen. Wolves inhabit this area, but are seldom seen.

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Day Four: to Suman

After breakfast you break camp and load all gers, equipment and provisions on to the camel carts. A full day ride takes you south to the Bayan Hills area, where Siberian Ibex and Argali Sheep are sometimes seen. Pitch camp at Suman. Usually there are many nomadic families in the immediate area, as there is a water source.



Day Five: to Zorgol Hairkhan

Today the trail heads east to the mountains of Zorgol Hairkhan (Sacred Zorgol), which can be seen in the distance all day. It is a striking feature on the otherwise undulating and flat steppe. Zorgol Hairkhan is mentioned in The Secret History of the Mongols, the oldest surviving Mongolian language literary work, which chronicles the life and genealogy of Genghis Khan. The Khan himself is said to have wintered here while in conflict with a competing leader.



There are more nomads and livestock emerging now and hopefully you will meet some during the ride. At Zorgol there are also breeding population of Cinereous Vulture, the largest of the Eurasian vultures, its size on a par with the Condor of the Americas. The nests are quite low, on rocks and small trees. Camp tonight will be at the larger massif, called Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Uul.



Day Six: to Baga Zorgol Hairkhan

Continue riding east, passing the small Gobi lake Hariin Nuur, with chances for spotting some interesting bird species. The lake acts as an "island" for waterfowl flying across this 'sea of grass'. You will cover about 25 km to reach the smaller, but still impressive, Baga Zorgol Hairhan Mountains. Usually the pastures are excellent here, and you should encounter some nomadic families with their livestock in the area. Pitch camp here and scan the ridges of these spectacular rock formations for Siberian ibex and Lammergeiers.

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Day Seven: to Övör Burd

The Gobi steppe in this area is quite variable. You are riding through the transition zone of the Gobi: true steppes, semi-arid steppes, sand dunes and also giant rock formations. Today you will have an opportunity to pass archaeological grave sites dating back to the Hunnu empire, from the time before the Christian era.



You ride for c.25-30 km east across the populated steppe, and for the full day you can see the Zorgol Hairkhan giant rock formations behind you in the distance. Several hundred metres high, they create a dramatic feature in the middle of the steppe.



Day Eight: to Shine Khudag

Today's ride turns north, a shorter distance to Shine Hudag, meaning 'New Well'. Water sources are important in the Gobi grasslands. As on other days, camp is loaded onto the camels. Sometimes you will ride alongside them, but often you take a less direct route to camp in order to explore interesting landscape features or for great views.



Day Nine: to Arburd Sands

A full day's ride for c.25-30 km towards Arburd Sands, passing several nomadic families. The human feature of this open and vast landscape is perhaps one of the most interesting, since all the families in the area are nomadic herdsman. A Sahara-like landscape in the middle of the Gobi grasslands, the sand dunes of Arburd extend for about 20km and are often a hideout for numerous wolves. You stay this night at Arburd Sands Ger Camp, which is located next to the dunes.

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Day Ten: Arburd Sands

You stay at the ger camp of Arburd Sands for another night, allowing for an opportunity to ride out and visit some nearby families over the day. Nomads here have large herds of cattle and cashmere goats. You may also choose to stay back and just relax at camp and enjoy the scenery.



Day Eleven: to Ulaanbaatar

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



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



Day Twelve: Departure

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

Accommodation

When in Ulaanbaatar (on the first and last nights of the ride) you will stay centrally in a modern hotel of reasonable standard with ensuite bathrooms. This is usually the Bayangol Hotel (Chingis Khan Avenue 5. Tel: 976 11 312 255).

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On the trail you will have two nights in a semi-permanent ger camp, and for the remaining seven nights you will stay in six-person teepees (two people sharing). You will be provided with a sleeping cot and blankets, but you will need to take your own sleeping bag.



If you feel the cold easily or your body is small, you should take some care in the selection of your sleeping bag. During cold spells early and late in the season, there is a very good chance of night temperatures below zero. Frost at these times is likely, and can sometimes happen even during the summer.

A good four season sleeping bag is definitely necessary early and late in the season.

A loo tent will be erected. Washing facilities are limited and you are asked to bring only biodegradable toiletries.

The kitchen (and dining room) will be in a ger, the practical and typical Mongolian dwelling. (The word “yurt”, which is in fact a Turkish word, is used in many countries to describe the ger). Four people assemble a ger within half an hour and helping to erect it is all part of the experience of being in Mongolia. 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 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.