

Steppe Nomad Ride, Mongolia

Hosted by the Steppe Nomads, this is a journey across the Mongolian steppe lands. Steppe habitats once made up 25 percent of the global land area but today many areas have been developed for agricultural output and only the Mongolian steppes have survived. The high elevation of Mongolia creates unusually clear air and starry nights the year round; an overwhelming visual experience of emptiness and vastness. The silent, treeless steppe, stretch away into the distance with no trace of human activity except for the nomads and their herds. This ride covers contrasting terrain with patchy water sources giving room for wildlife. Wolves may be heard in the summer, but usually not seen.

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

Itinerary

Day 1: Ulaanbaatar

Met on arrival at Ulaanbaatar and transferred to your hotel. If you are arranging your own flights you should aim to arrive in Ulaanbaatar by 16:00. 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 2: To The Grasslands

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.

Leaving Ulaanbaatar you drive south to the steppes, stopping for a picnic en route. You arrive at Tseel, where your ger camp has been set up near a water source. Meet your crew and the horses and, if there is time, have an introductory ride.



Day 3: To Hoyd Önjuul

Today you ride to the high mountains of Hoyd Önjuul in the west, a wilderness area with vertical rock faces, hills and mountains up to an elevation of about 1,800 metres. Due to the lack of water sources, this is an area little visited by nomads, and for this reason there are some 400 Red deer and Argail sheep to be found here on the edge of the Gobi. After exploring the area on horseback you ride back over the grasslands to camp.

Day 4: To Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

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



Leaving the carts your route takes you east across the grassland to Bayan Mountain, home to Gobi high altitude fauna like Siberian Ibex and Argali Sheep. Small herds of gazelle may also be seen on the steppe, and perhaps some wolves.

Camp is pitched at Zorgol Hairkhan, where you stay for the next two nights.



Day 5: Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

The landscape is quite diverse here since you are in the transition zone of the Gobi; there is true steppe, semi arid steppe, and also giant rock formations. You spend this full day exploring the Zorgol Hairkhan massif on horseback and ride around and through rock formations several hundred metres high, a striking feature the middle of the 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 is a breeding population of Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), the largest of the Eurasian vultures, its size on par with the Condor of the Americas. Their nests are quite low, on rocks and in small trees, and very visible.



Day 6: To Saikhan

Again you break camp and leave the camel carts. You will likely encounter quite a few nomadic families as you head for Hariin Nuur, a steppe lake useful for the steppe nomads. Usually the lake attracts different species of birds.

In the afternoon you arrive at Saikhan, where camp has been set up.



Day 7: Uushig

A full day ride takes you across the steppe to Uushig, which again is an uninhabited area, featuring a small spring and some spectacular rock formations, hopefully with some good wildlife sightings. You will also be able to see some of the petroglyphs, for which Mongolia is so famous. Later ride back to Saikhan for the night.

Day 8: To Arburd Sands

For the final time, camp is packed up onto the camel carts. The trail this morning takes you across the Gobi grasslands to Arburd Sands ger camp. These are the northernmost sand dunes of Mongolia.



Lunch is at the ger camp and in the afternoon you ride a short way to some seasonal steppe lakes, which are kept in place by the underlying permafrost. Perhaps visit nomads with large herds of cattle and cashmere goats in the area before returning to Arburd Sands Ger Camp for the night.

Day 9: Arburd Sands

On your last day on the grasslands you ride a circular route across the 20km long Arburd Sands, which are a hideout for wolves. If you prefer, you may also relax back at camp.



Day 10: 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 by the Tumen Ekh ensemble, featuring folk and traditional Mongolian music, song, dance and contortion. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 11: 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 Steppe Nomads Ride you stay in a spacious ger on a made up bed, with a stove for warmth on cold nights. Most camps will be by a water source, 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.

The last two nights are spent at Arburd Sands Ger Camp.

