

Orkhon Valley Camping Trail, Mongolia

Itinerary

Day 1 - Ulaanbaatar

You are met on arrival at Ulaanbaatar and transferred to your hotel.

Please note that the itinerary may vary due to local conditions, but always with your best interests in mind.

After lunch visit Gandantegchinlin Monastery and the National Museum of Mongolian History.

Built in 1809, the Gandantegchinlin Monastery (formerly known as the Gandan Monastery) is a Tibetan-style Buddhist monastery located in Ulan Bator. Its name is of Tibetan origin and can be translated as "Great site full of Joy". Several hundred monks currently reside there. The National Museum of Mongolian History tells the story of the country, from prehistoric times to today.

Dinner downtown and overnight at the hotel.



Day 2 - to Karakorum

After breakfast transfer to Karakorum (c.6-7 hours drive, depending on the condition of the roads) and visit Erdene Zuu Monastery. You will stop for a picnic lunch on the way.

Karakorum (Kharkhorin) is the ancient capital of the Mongol Empire, founded in 1235 by Ogödei, the son of Genghis Khan. In 1260, Kublai Khan transfers the capital to Beijing. Karakorum was destroyed in 1388 by troops of the Ming Dynasty. Of its former glory remain mere turtle statues guarding the entrances to the city walls.

In 1585, Erdene Zuu was built just outside the walls of the ruins of the ancient capital after the introduction

of Buddhism in Mongolia as the state religion. Stones from the ruins of Karakorum were used in the construction. The monastery was damaged in the 1680s, but was rebuilt in the 18th century and in 1872. For centuries, Erdene Zuu was the most important religious shrine in Mongolia.

After the fall of communism in Mongolia in 1990, the monastery was given to lamas and Erdene Zuu became a place of worship once again. Today Erdene Zuu remains an active Buddhist monastery, as well as a museum.

After the visit, set up camp at the entrance of the Orkhon Valley for dinner and overnight.



Day 3 - in the Orkhon Valley

After breakfast you meet the nomadic herders and horses. The ride today starts in the northern mountains of the Orkhon Valley. The vehicles will meet you with a picnic lunch, so there is the opportunity to try out the paces of your horses.

Set up camp for dinner and overnight.



Day 4 – Riding in the Orkhon Valley

Another day riding in the Khangai Mountains.

Lunch is brought to you by support vehicles again and after lunch you continue to ride on before setting up camp for dinner and overnight.



Day 5 - Tovkhon Monastery

After breakfast you ride to Tovkhon Monastery, which towers above the Orkhon Valley at an altitude of 2,400m.

Tovkhon Monastery includes several small temples, the oldest of which was built in 1654 for Zanabazar, who was the first spiritual leader of Buddhists in the line of Geluggas in Mongolia. Zanabazar brought a new beginning to the region on issues related to spirituality, including theology, language, art, medicine and astronomy. He composed sacred music, mastered the art of bronze and painting, and invented Soyombo writing in 1686.

After a picnic lunch you ride down the mountain to the Orkhon Valley with amazing views of the valley and forested mountains. This area is known as the cradle of the nomadic way of life in Mongolia

After the ride, set up camp for dinner and overnight.



Day 6- Orkhon Valley

After breakfast, you ride through the valley to the Orkhon Falls.

The Orkhon Falls are actually the Ulaan Tsutgalan River Falls. The river falls into a spectacular canyon formed after an earthquake and a volcanic eruption more than 20,000 years ago, forming a cascade of 20m high and 10m wide.

You continue riding upstream where the landscape becomes wilder and wilder. This volcanic region has black ancient lava flows, which contrast with the white running water of the Orkhon River.

After lunch you reach the larch forest with the impressive Naiman Nuur mountains in front of you.

Set up camp for dinner and overnight.



Day 7 - into Naiman Nuur Park (with pack yaks)

For the next three days the ride will have a totally different pace. After the wide open spaces you now ride into the wild and remote Naiman Nuur Natural Park ('The Eight Lakes Park'). Pack horses or yaks carry the equipment and your personal belongings for these three days as this beautiful and isolated area is not accessible to vehicles.

You pack the luggage and equipment on the yaks and start the steep ride to the mountains.

For the next two nights you will stay in guest gers (2 – 5 guests per ger) with a nomadic family of yak breeders who live in this remote park.



Day 8- Naiman Nuur Park

Today you ride without the pack animals in beautiful forested mountains, discovering the wonderful scenic lakes of the Naiman Nuur Park.

Dinner and overnight at the guest gers (2 – 5 guests per ger).



Day 9 - towards Orkhon Valley (with pack yaks)

Today you leave the Naiman Nuur Park with the pack yaks and return to the Orkhon Valley. The ride takes you through steep mountains and you will appreciate the sure footed horses and the ability of your yak drivers!

Camp is set up close to the yak breeder's ger. Dinner and overnight in tents.



Day 10 - with the nomad family

This last day in the Orkhon Valley is spent with a nomadic family. This day is devoted to discovering the traditional lifestyle of the Mongolian nomads.



Each ger camp is home to a family whose daily lives are punctuated by the care of their herds: milking mares, sheep, goats and dris (female yaks), caring for sick or debilitated animals, moving animals to new pastures. Women also take care of the children, cook and prepare different milk products (butter, cheese, fermented mare's milk, drinking milk) and maintain the interior of the ger. The men look after animals, maintenance of hardware and harness horses. They also cut wood for cooking.

During the day you can still spend a few hours in the saddle, helping the family to round up the herds, or perhaps just going for a ride to explore the region.

Overnight in a "guest-ger", close to the nomad family's ger (2 – 5 guests per ger).



Day 11 - Khogno Khan Park (mini-Gobi)

After breakfast you transfer to Hogno Han Park (c.4 hours drive, depending on the condition of the roads) with a picnic lunch enroute. Today or tomorrow there may be the chance to ride a camel if you wish.

Located about 280 km from the capital, Khogno Khan Park has amazing rock formations; cliffs shaped by erosion overlooking vast semi-desert plains. Here you will discover the Ovgon Khiid Monastery, built during the 17th century. The park is also home to huge sand dunes offering a variety of stunning landscapes that earned the region its nickname of "Mini Gobi".

After lunch visit Ovgon Khiid Monastery and, if you wish, take a short hike in the Elsentasarhaï sand dunes.

Your last night in the steppes are spent in a permanent ger camp, close to the majestic cliffs, with dinner in the ger camp restaurant (2 – 5 guests per ger).



Day 12 - Ulaanbaatar

An early departure this morning to Ulaanbaatar with a picnic lunch enroute. The rest of the afternoon is free for shopping in Ulaanbaatar.

In the late afternoon, you attend a show with traditional dances, music and songs from Mongolia, including the amazing Khoomei.

The Khoomei is an overtone singing (throat singing) in which the singer produces two distinctively audible pitches at the same time, including a low pedal note, or drone, derived from the fundamental frequency of the vocal cord vibrations, and higher melodic notes that result when the singer's mouth acts as a filter, selecting one note at a time from among the drone's natural overtone series pitches.

Overnight in a hotel. Dinner is to your own account this evening.



Day 13 - Ulaanbaatar

Transfer to the airport after breakfast for your flight home.

Accommodation

When in Ulaanbaatar (first and last nights of the rides) you will stay centrally in a modern hotel of reasonable standard with ensuite bathrooms. This is usually the Dream Hotel (Khoroo 4, Ulaanbaatar 21646. Tel: +976 11 32 1253).



On the trail you will stay in two-person tents. Single tents are available at no extra cost. You will be provided with a sleeping mat.



You will need to bring 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 loo screen and washing tent will be erected each evening (except for the wild camping nights), but washing facilities are limited and you are asked to bring only biodegradable toiletries.

The kitchen (and dining room) will be in a large tent.

Three nights will be spent in a 'guest ger' next to a nomad family's ger, and another night will be spent in a semi-permanent ger camp with shower facilities. On these nights single accommodation is not available and there could be up to five people sharing a ger.

