

Dunes and Steppes of Mongolia

Itinerary

Monday- 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.



Tuesday- to Bayan Gobi Desert

After breakfast transfer to the Bayan Gobi Desert, the "rich Gobi" (c.5 – 6 hours, depending on the condition of the roads) with a picnic lunch on the way.

Khogno Khan Park is home to huge sand dunes offering a variety of stunning landscapes that earned the region its nickname of "Mini Gobi" or "Bayan Gobi".

Meet the nomadic herder who will be your horse guide for the next three days of horse riding in the Bayan Gobi, between dunes and steppes.

The first camp is in a sparsely populated area on the southern edge of the Bayan Gobi Desert.

Dinner and overnight in tents.



Wednesday and Thursday - in the Bayan Gobi Desert

The next two days are spent riding in the Bayan Gobi Desert, the heart of Mongolia.

The geographical centre of Mongolia, the area you are riding in is the junction of three major ecosystems: two of the main mountain ranges (the Khangai and the Khenti) and a northern edge of the Gobi Desert.

There are many camels in the dunes, and there may be the opportunity to experience riding one of these animals.

Every night after riding between dunes, rivers and steppes, you set up camp.



Friday -Ovgon Khiid monastery

This afternoon you reach the Khogno Khan cliffs, where you visit Ovgon Khiid monastery.

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, a small

monastery built during the 17th century, set in dramatic scenery.

Dinner and overnight in a ger camp nestled at the foot of the cliffs (2 – 4 guests per ger).



Saturday - to the Orkhon Valley

After breakfast, a 4-5 hour drive to the Orkhon Valley (depending on the condition of the roads), a famous World Heritage Site in Central Mongolia. Meet the nomadic herders and horses who will be your companions during the next eight days.

Classified in 2004 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as the cradle of nomadic Mongolia, the cultural landscape of the Orkhon Valley (about 121.967 hectares) covers an extensive area of pastureland that stretches approximately 80km long and 15km wide on both banks of the Orkhon River.

The change in environment is striking: after the desert and sandy expanses of Bayan Gobi, you are now in a mountainous area, a maze of green valleys with forested slopes.

After lunch, your ride begins in the larch forests covering the first slopes of the Naiman Nuur Park, upstream in the Orkhon Valley.

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



Sunday to Thursday

These five days riding are spent exploring the Orkhon Valley, starting upstream close to Naiman Nuur Park and travelling down to Karakorum, the former capital of the Mongol Empire.



During the course of these five days you will see the Orkhon Falls, Tovkhon Monastery and the Khangai Mountains bordering the northern part of the valley and have a bathe at Mogoit Hot Springs.

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.



Tovkhon Monastery towers above the Orkhon Valley at an altitude of 2,400m. The 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 Gelugpas 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.



Tuesday ends in Karakorum and a visit to Erdene Zuu Monastery.

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.



Three nights will be spent in tents; one night will be spent in a guest ger (2 – 5 guests per ger) close to a nomadic family; and the last night will be spent in tourist ger camp in Karakorum (2 – 4 guests per ger).



Friday - to 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.



Saturday - 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. Guests are expected to set up their own tents on the camping nights.



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, 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.

One night will be spent in a 'guest ger' next to the nomad family's ger, and two nights will be spent in semi-permanent ger camps with shower facilities. On these nights single accommodation is not available.

