

# Orkhon Valley Ger Trail, Mongolia

## Itinerary

### Saturday - 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.



### Sunday - to Khogno Khan Park (Bayan Gobi)

After breakfast, transfer to Khogno Khan Park (c.5 hours, depending on the condition of the roads). You will stop for lunch on the way.

*Located about 280 km from the capital, Khogno Khan Park has amazing rock formations; cliffs shaped by erosion overlooking vast semi-desert plains. The park is also home to huge sand dunes offering a variety of stunning landscapes that earned the region its nickname of "Mini Gobi" or "Bayan Gobi".*

In the afternoon, a short introductory ride in the Bayan Gobi, the "rich desert", through typical Gobi desert landscape. The ride takes you to Ovgon Khiid Monastery, a small monastery built during the 17<sup>th</sup>

century, set in dramatic scenery. Today or tomorrow, there may be the chance to ride a camel if you wish.

Dinner and overnight in a tourist ger camp (up to 5 guests per ger).



### Monday - Khogno Khan (Bayan Gobi)

A full day ride through the Bayan Gobi semi-desert steppes, with the dramatic scenery of Elsentsarhai high dunes, black cliffs and a touch of greenery brought by the river.

After lunch continue through the contrasting landscape of desert dunes and the marshland that borders them. As you leave the dunes you may encounter the nomads who often gather their herds in this vast wet plain. Arrive at the new ger camp in the semi-desert environment.

Dinner and overnight in gers (2 to 4 guests per ger).



### Tuesday - to Orkhon Valley

After breakfast, you travel by vehicle through the Orkhon Valley to meet the family of the nomads who will guide you during the rest of the trail, and who

breed the horses you will ride (c.4 - 5 hours, depending on the condition of the roads and tracks).

A late lunch and then a short ride in the valley to get to know your new horse. When you return to the gers there should be time to try an alternative horse if necessary. The rest of the day is devoted to the discovery of the traditional lifestyle of the nomads of Mongolia.



*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.*

*There may be the opportunity to become involved in these activities as you become acquainted with the various family members.*

Overnight in a "guest-ger", close to the nomad family's ger.



**Wednesday - Orkhon Valley**

After breakfast with the family, ride in the upstream part of the Valley where the landscape becomes wilder and wilder. This volcanic region has ancient black lava flows, which contrast with the white running water of the Orkhon River.

Continuing upstream after lunch, you reach the forest with the impressive Naiman Nuur mountains in front of you.

Dinner and overnight in a remote ger camp in the forest (2 – 4 guests per ger).



**Thursday - Orkhon Falls**

This day sees you following the Orkhon River upstream as you ride through the Valley. After lunch you continue on to camp by 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.*

Dinner and overnight in gers (2 – 4 guests per ger).



**Friday - Uurt Canyon**



Another full day on horseback as you ride to one of the most famous sites of the Orkhon Valley, Uurt Canyon. The landscapes of the downstream section of the valley are more open, towered by two mountain ranges, and you will likely meet lots of nomadic families with their herds taking advantage of the rich grass of the valley.

The ger camp is located in a beautiful site, bordering the canyon of the Orkhon River. You will spend two nights in this camp (2 – 4 guests per ger).



#### **Saturday - Uurt**

Today you ride in the surrounding mountains, getting stunning views of the Orkhon Valley.

Dinner and overnight back at the same camp (2 – 4 guests per ger).



#### **Sunday - Khujirt**

After breakfast, your ride takes you on the southern mountains bordering the Orkhon Valley, in the Khujirt region. Khujirt is famous for its water, which is bottled and sent all over Mongolia. The view of the river, which is now much wider and lazy among wavy grassy hills, is spectacular.

After a picnic lunch you arrive in the afternoon at a unique environment friendly ger camp, with incredible views of the valley.

Dinner and overnight at the ger camp (2 – 3 guests per ger).



#### **Monday - Karakorum**

Today is your last day on horseback in the Orkhon Valley. In the last miles before Karakorum, the former capital of Mongolian Empire, the Valley is narrower, offering wonderful views from the mountain slopes of the Orkhon River.

This part of the Orkhon Valley is one of the nicest, as the river is very calm. The dark blue water contrasts with the lush green of the grass, and the white gers around. Many herds roam in the steppes and this is the picture of typical Mongolia today.

Eventually it is time to say good bye to your horses and nomadic friends.

Dinner and overnight in gers (2 – 4 guests per ger).



#### **Tuesday - Hustai National Park**

After breakfast, you visit 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 transferred the capital to Beijing and 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.*

*In 1939 the communist leader Horloogiyn Choybalsan destroyed the monastery, in a purge that resulted in the disappearance of hundreds of monasteries in Mongolia and killed over ten thousand monks. Three small temples and the outer wall with the stupas remained.*

*The site was restored at the end of the century and regained part of its religious aspect. Today Erdene Zuu remains an active Buddhist monastery as well as a museum that is open to tourists.*



You continue from Erdene Zuu to Hustai National Park (c.4 hours drive, depending on the condition of the roads).

*Declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2002, the Hustai National Park covers 50,000 hectares of steppe and mountain forest and is home to many species of mammals and birds. It is best known for hosting the conservation project to protect the endangered Takhi. This wild horse, also known as Przewalski's horse, had completely disappeared from its natural habitat. Only a few specimens were still present in zoos around the world. A breeding and reintroduction program was initiated in 1992, resulting in a wild and sustainable Takhi population inside the Khustai park which now stands at about 450 horses.*

During the afternoon, you have a vehicle drive in the park in search of the Takhi.

Dinner and overnight at the ger camp (2 – 4 guests per ger).



#### **Wednesday - Ulaanbaatar**

An early departure this morning to Ulaanbaatar (c.2.5 hours drive, depending on the condition of the roads). Lunch and free time 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.





**Thursday** - 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 Hotel Nine (8 Amar street, Sukhbaatar district, 8th khoroo, Ulaanbaatar 212513. Tel: +976 7711 4334 / +976 1133 0330).



On the trail you stay in comfortable semi-permanent ger camps each night, with proper single beds. Please note that the gers sleep two to five guests and this accommodation may be shared with other riders on the trail. A central stove is lit for warmth on cold nights, particularly welcome early and late in the season. It is not possible to guarantee a single/twin ger.



Showers are available on most nights.



One night will be spent in a 'guest ger' next to the nomad family's ger. A loo screen is erected, but showers are not available on this night.

