



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Mongolia – Naadam Festival – Off the Tourist Trail

Tour Duration – 14 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○ | Adventure ●●●○ | Culture ●●●● | History ●●●○ | Wildlife●●●○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Witness the incredible Naadam Festival in off the beaten track surrounds
- ✓ Discover the flaming cliffs of Bayanzag, where dinosaur eggs were found in 1922
- ✓ Clamber amongst Mongolia's huge sand dunes
- ✓ See the wild horses of Hustai National Park
- ✓ Beautiful natural scenery





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mostly traditional 'ger' (yurt) camps and 4 nights in a comfortable hotel
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus most lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Maximum of 12
Start Point: Ulaan Baatar – you can arrive any time before 17:00 on the first day
End Point: Ulaan Baatar – you can depart any time on the last day
Transport: Mini-vans and/or private buses
Country Visited: Mongolia

Mongolia – Naadam Festival – Off the Tourist Trail

Ask travellers why they want to visit Mongolia and often you will be told that it is to experience the world famous Naadam Festival which takes place every July. Indeed, it is an incredible festival and an excellent time to visit the country. But rather than enjoying Naadam in Ulaan Baatar, which can be overcrowded and touristy, we will travel instead to the countryside where the real flavour of this epic event can be experienced and enjoyed with the local people. On this tour we will visit the cultural city of Ulaan Baatar before travelling south to the Gobi. Head to the Khongor sand dunes, the tallest dunes in Mongolia before discovering the flaming cliffs of Bayanzag, where dinosaur eggs were found in 1922 by Roy Chapman Andrews. Make our way north to the Ongi Monastery before heading to the town of Arvaikheer located on the northern edge of the Gobi Desert. Here you will experience an authentic Naadam Festival, away from the crowds. Finally, your adventure ends with a visit to Hustai National Park which is home to the only truly wild horses on earth, the Takhi horse.





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Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Ulaan Baatar

We arrive in Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia's capital where we are transferred from the airport to our hotel. Depending on the time of your arrival, you may be able to visit the Chinggis Khaan's Museum. Overnight Bayangol Hotel or similar. (D)

Day 2: Ulaan Baatar - Chinggis Khan's Statue- Baga Gazriin Chuluu

This morning we start early as we visit the 45m tall statue of Chinggis Khan. Our journey then continues south to Baga Gazriin Chuluu, an area of picturesque granite formations in the middle of the Gobi. This area also has much wildlife that you might get a glimpse of, such as mountain sheep, white-tailed gazelle, hare, and many more. We will enjoy a walk around the amazing locations scattered around the area. Overnight in ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 30 km on dirt road and 230km tarmac road to a camp, approx. 4-4.5 hours

Day 3: Baga Gazriin Chuluu to Tsagaan Suvarga Cliffs

After breakfast, we drive through the Gobi to Tsagaan Suvarga. Tsagaan Suvarga (or White Stupa) and also known as the mini-Grand Canyon, is a sheer slope that was an ancient seabed. Over millions of years various changes in the environment have produced its famous-coloured layers. The formation is over 50 meters at its highest point, and it is a sheer slope, which from a distance seems to be the ruins of an ancient city. Overnight ger camp. BLD

Total driving: 60 km on dirt road and 180km tarmac road to a camp, approx. 4-5 hours

Day 4: Tsagaan Suvarga Cliffs and Yol Gorge

This morning, we head south to Dalanzadgad, the provincial capital of South Gobi. We then continue the drive to Yol Gorge. The gorge is 2800m above sea level, is about 40 km long and up to 200m high. The gorge is named after the Lammergeier, which is called Yol in Mongolia or better known as the White Bearded Vulture. The Yol is very rare and lives only in Central Asia at heights between 1500-3000m. The valley is blocked from sunlight and contains thick ice layers throughout the year, but, recently, because of global warming the ice melts down in late summer. We will explore in the gorge before we return to our ger camp. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 30 km on dirt road and 120km tarmac road to a camp, approx. 3-3.5 hours



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Day 5: Yol Gorge to Khongor Sand Dunes

This morning we drive to Khongor Sand Dunes, some of the largest and most impressive white sand dunes in Mongolia. Khongor Sand Dunes stretches more than 180 km (112 miles) with majestic heights of 15-30 m. The largest dunes are northwest of the range up to 300 metres high. From the top of the dunes, the view of the desert is incredible, and one can also see the Khongoryn River flowing in amongst the desert feeding the nearby oases. We will take a camel ride before returning to camp. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 180 km on dirt road and 50km tarmac road to a camp, approx. 5 hours

Day 6: Khongor Sand Dunes

It is a lovely relaxing day spent in the Gobi. Did you know that the name "Khongor" means palomino horse in Mongolian? Enjoy walks near the camp and visit the sand dunes. The dunes make sound like a plane engine on a windy day, so they have also been named the "Singing Dunes". Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 30 min drive to Sand Dunes

Day 7: Khongor Sand Dunes to Bayanzag and the flaming cliffs

Today we drive to Gobi Gurdvansaikhan National Park, located in the southern part of central Mongolia not far from the border. The eastern side of the park features the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains which are locally known as the "Three Beauties." These rugged mountains account for about half of the park's terrain. They are also home to the endangered snow leopard. We will explore the area on foot before we drive to our ger camp. We visit to Flaming Cliffs in the evening and enjoy our sunset in the Gobi. The Flaming Cliffs are home to the fossils of ancient creatures from the dog-sized herbivore Protoceratops to the ferocious predator Velociraptor. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 150 km on dirt road to a camp, approx. 4 hours

Day 8: Bayanzag to Ongi monastery

Today we will drive to Ongi Monastery and transfer to ger camp. Ongi Monastery is the collective name for the ruins of two monasteries that face each other across the Ongi River in Saikhan-Ovoo district of Dundgovi Province. The Barlim Monastery is located on the north bank of the river while the Khutagt Monastery sits on the south bank. Both complexes of Ongi Monastery were completely destroyed in 1939 during anti-religious purges. Over 200 monks were killed, and many surviving monks were imprisoned or forced conscripts into the Communist controlled army. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 180 km on dirt road to a camp, approx. 4-4.5 hours

Day 9: Arvaikheer town

It is an early start this morning as we set off for Arvaiheer town. It is pre-Naadam Day at town and we will visit the local horse trainers camping area. Here, jockeys and trainers will be getting ready for the race tomorrow. It is always a good to see build-up of excitement and feel the true atmosphere of Naadam Festival. Overnight tourist class hotel. (BLD)

Total driving: 150 km on dirt road to a camp, approx. 3-4 hours

Day 10: Naadam Festival

We will attend the opening ceremony for this local Naadam Festival and then spend the day here. There will be the opportunities to view the horse racing and wrestling. There are 5 horse races according to the horse ages and starting from 2-year-old yearlings. There will also be archery which will take a place near to the stadium. Overnight tourist class hotel. (BLD)

Day 11: Kharkhorin

After breakfast we drive out of town and head to Kharkhorin. Back in the 13th Century, Kharkhorin was constructed as a capital city which attracted traders, dignitaries and skilled workers from across Asia and even Europe. The Mongolian Empire was governed from this city until Khubilai Khan moved the capital to Beijing. Kharakhorum was completely destroyed by vengeful Ming troops in 1380. A few relics remained,





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notably two granite turtles, the base of a palace, some stone lions, two columns, and a few traces of an irrigation channel. Today the only information known about the rise and prominence of Kharakhorum comes from the notes and stories of travellers who visited the city during its peak years. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)
Total driving: 60 km on dirt and 75 km on tarmac road to a camp, approx. 4-4.5 hours

Day 12: Hustai National Park

Today we will visit Erdene Zuu Monastery complex and Kharkhorin Museum. We will then drive to Hustai National Park. This National Park, famous for the Takhi (Przewalskii's) wild horses. The horses were successfully reintroduced to the preserve after having been extinct in the wild since the 1960's. The steppe and forest-steppe environment is also inhabited by maral, steppe gazelle, deer, boar, wildcat, wolf and lynx; there is interesting birdlife including Eurasian eagle-owl, boreal owl and Eurasian nightjar as well as migratory cranes. Overnight ger camp. (BLD)

Total driving: 20 km on dirt and 260 km on tarmac road to a camp, approx. 4-4.5 hours

Day 13: Ulaan Baatar

This morning we return to Ulaan Baatar and transfer to our hotel. On our way we will have picnic lunch. In the late afternoon there will be an opportunity for shopping or to explore the city on your own, before our farewell dinner. Overnight Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Total driving: 20 km on dirt and 80 km on tarmac road to a camp, approx. 2-3 hours

Day 14: Departure from Ulaan Baatar

The tour finishes this morning after breakfast and a transfer to the airport will be provided to coincide with your departure. (B)

Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
Transport throughout
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guide
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks
Items of a personal nature
Tips (discretionary)



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Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not advise against travel to any of the areas within Mongolia that we visit on our tours. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or if you would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis, please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

Wherever possible we aim to use characterful accommodation that enhances the overall travel experience, not just offers a bed for the night. This can obviously vary dramatically from country to country and from trip to trip. On this particular trip we will stay in a comfortable 3* hotel in Ulaan Baatar. In the Ger camps you will sleep in the native Mongolian dwellings which Russians call "yurts". Although not luxurious, they are clean, comfortable and cosy. Bedding is provided, and there are shared showers, washing and toilet facilities with hot water. Please note that the accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is intended as a guide only and is always subject to availability.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.



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Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements, you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £5 / Dinner £13

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1.50 / Bottle of Water £1.00

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise across Asia. If your local guide has been helpful, then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Generally limited to Ulaan Baatar. We would recommend that you bring cash

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are not widely accepted except for high hotels and restaurants

Local Currency: Tugrik

Recommended Currency for Exchange: The US Dollar can generally be changed without too much difficulty in larger towns and cities. We would advise against travelling with sterling as it will be more difficult to exchange.

Where to Exchange: In major towns and cities. Your guide will provide assistance.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.



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Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to Mongolia.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements, you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Asia, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you will need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory that you are travelling to.



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Preparing for your tour

Climate

Mongolia has an extreme continental climate similar to that of south-central Siberia or Manchuria and enhanced by a mean elevation of 1500m. Winters are long and very cold. There is a swift transition in May to a short, warm summer and an equally rapid return to the winter cold in October. Summer temperatures vary from around 35°C in the desert to as low as 15°C in the mountains. Frost can occur in the mornings in the Terelj National Park. Rainfall is low everywhere; no more than 38-51cm a year in the mountains and as little as 13cm in the drier lowland parts although do come prepared for the occasional downpour. Be prepared for all weather conditions during your tour. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, with a jumper or fleece for the nights. It is advisable to wear a hat through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

Equipment

Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is advisable to take a torch, as the electricity supply can be erratic.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Sturdy but comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended. Sandals or lighter shoes are fine when we travel between destinations.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs usually have two round pins.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour, but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 17 April 2023.

