



Gobi Steppe Ride camel carts supported



Photos: Ana Nordenstahl



Photos: Bertrand Sinsaine



Photo: Haroldo Castro



Photo: Jan Wigsten



Photo: Densmaa



Photo: Jan Wigsten

This horseback journey across the Mongolian steppe lands is hosted by the Steppe Nomads themselves, the largest remaining pastoralist people on Earth. An experience not available anywhere else on Earth. Steppe habitats once made up 25 percent of the global land area. Today the Pampas, the Puszta, the Prairies and the Ukrainian steppes have largely been developed for agricultural output. Only the Mongolian steppes have survived. The high elevation of Mongolia creates unusually clear air and starry nights the year round. It is an overwhelming visual experience of emptiness and vastness to ride into the great Mongolian void. The silent, treeless steppe, completely devoid of any fences. Stretching away into the distance: no trace of human activity except for the pastoralists themselves and their herds. This ride covers surprisingly contrasting habitat, patchy water sources along the way nurturing wildlife. Wolves may be heard vocalizing at any time in the summer, but usually, they are not seen. We will undertake this horse ride as a "Nomadic Journey", e.g. without vehicle support, in wild terrain. All our luggage will be loaded onto camel carts; They are Bactrian two-humped camels, well adapted to the winter climate in Mongolia. Even a ger (Mongolian yurt) will be carried to serve as our mobile restaurant.

Day 1: Ulaanbaatar

Arrive at the Mongolian capital and transfer to the hotel. Tour briefing after dinner.

Day 2: To Tseel

After breakfast we will visit the Gandan Monastery, the centerpiece for the revival of Buddhist Lamaism in Mongolia. With luck we will catch the prayer times. Then drive south out of the city and enjoy a picnic lunch on the grasslands. Continue across the steppe to a place in the middle of nowhere called Tseel. Our nomad hosts will meet us at Tseel with their horses and Bactrian camels. The area of Tseel has no or few nomads. We select our riding horses. There will be a briefing and a short trial ride.

Day 3: Hoyd Önjuul

Today we will start our ride going west to the mountains of Hoyd Önjuul. In the surrounding area it is usually possible to spot herds of Mongolian Gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*) also known as White-tailed Gazelle. With luck we may even see the Black-tailed Goitred Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*) which is better adapted to arid environment indicating that we are riding in the transition zone of grasslands and desert steppes. In the mountain area we sometimes are able to see Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) which Americans call Elk or Wapiti. Certainly Wolves (*Canis lupus*) are around but seldom seen.

Day 4: To Suman

Following breakfast we will break camp and load all gers, equipment and provisions on to the camel carts caravan. We will ride for the full day south to the area Bayan Hills, where high-altitude fauna such as Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) and Argali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*) sometimes is seen. Argali is the largest wild sheep in the world. Pitch camp at Suman. Usually there are many nomadic families in the immediate area, as there is a water source (Hudag means "well" in Mongolian).

Day 5: To Zorgol Hairkhan

Today we will turn east and ride to the rock wall like mountains of Zorgol Hairkhan (Sacred Zorgol) which can be seen in the distance all day. It is a striking feature on the otherwise undulating and 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.



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The Khan himself is said to have wintered here while in conflict with a competing leader. There are more nomads and livestock emerging now. We will be able to meet some during the ride. At Zorgol there are also breeding population of Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypus monachus*), the largest of the Eurasian vultures, its size on par with the Condor of the Americas. The nests are quite low, on rocks and small trees. Our camp will be at the larger massif, called Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Uul.

Day :6 To Baga Zorgol Hairkhan

We continue riding east, passing the small Gobi lake Hariin Nuur, with chances for spotting some interesting bird species. The lake acts as an "island" for waterfowl flying across this "sea of grass". We cover about 25 km to reach the smaller – but still impressive – Baga (small) Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains. Usually the pastures are excellent here, why we will encounter some nomadic families with their livestock around here. We pitch camp here and scan the ridges of these spectacular rock formations for Siberian Ibex and Lammergeiers. Gobi high altitude fauna such as Argali Sheep are present in the hills and rocks, and, if lucky, may be seen during the day.

Day 7: To Övör Burd

The Gobi steppe in this area is quite variable since we ride through the transition zone of the Gobi, meaning there is true steppe, semi-arid steppe, sand dunes and also giant rock formations. Today we will have an opportunity to pass archaeological grave sites dating back to the Hunnu empire, i.e. from the time before the Christian era. We will ride for 25-30 km east across the populated steppe and for the full day we can see the Zorgol Hairkhan giant rock formations behind us in the distance. They are several hundred meters high, and are the central feature in the middle of the steppe.



Photos: Bertrand Sinsaine

Day 8: To Shine Khudag

Today's ride turns north, a shorter distance to Shine Khudag, meaning New Well. Water sources are important in the Gobi grasslands. Our camp is loaded onto the camel caravan each day. Sometimes we will ride alongside the caravan, but often we will stray away from its straight course to explore interesting landscape features or for great views.

Day 9: To Arburd Sands

We ride full day for 25-30 km to Arburd Sands, passing several nomadic herder families along the way. The human inhabitants of this open and vast landscape are perhaps the most interesting, since all families in the area are nomadic herders. The sand dunes of Arburd extend for about 20km. They are a hideout for wolves and often we can see wolf tracks here. It is a Sahara-like landscape in the middle of the Gobi grasslands. Our camel caravan will need to take a route around the sand dunes, while we can cross them on horseback. We stay at Arburd Sands Ger Camp for the night, which is located next to the dunes.

Day 10: Arburd Sands

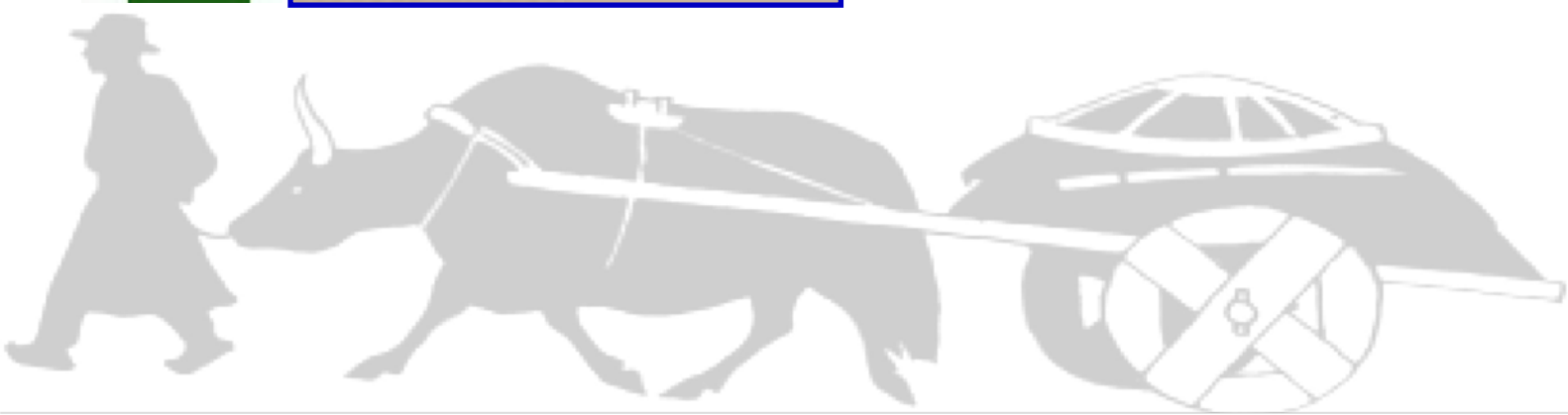
We will stay at the seasonal fully collapsible summer felted ger camp of Arburd Sands for another night, allowing for an opportunity to ride out and visit some nearby families over the day. Nomads here have large herds of cattle, especially cashmere goats. You may also choose to stay back and just relax at camp and enjoy the scenery.

Day 11: To Ulaanbaatar

The return drive to Ulaanbaatar is about three hours. In the afternoon you may explore the small city center on your own. Distances are short and nearly all points of interest can be reached on foot. Your guide is standing by to assist you in your shopping or sightseeing choices. We will have a dinner together in a local restaurant followed by folk music entertainment. Certainly there will be throat singers. Hotel overnight.

Day 12: Departure

Transfer to the airport, railway station or to your next Mongolian destination. We can recommend a stay at Jalman Meadows Ger Camp in the Khan Khentii Protected Area, which provides for a sharp contrast to the Gobi Steppes experience.





Practicalities:

We emphasize the quality of human contacts and encounters with local people and respect for the horse and local equestrian traditions, from which many lessons can be learnt. To travel with Nomadic Journeys means a shared adventure with horses and camel carts in the great outdoors, choosing the life of the nomad.

Transport: Apart from the short drive to the starting point of our horse riding adventure and back to the city we will not rely on any motor vehicle support. Instead we utilize traditional wooden carts, that Mongolian families still frequently use, when moving from one pasture to another (Although increasingly small trucks are being used). Animals prevalent in the region pull these carts. Here we will use camels and/or horses. The services of local herdsmen will be employed by the expedition, and they will provide us with their animals.

Accommodation: During the horse ride we will stay in spacious tentpits. We take along a Mongolian ger to serve as our restaurant, as well as showers and compost toilets housed in traditional Mongolian marquee style tents. For two nights we stay at the family-run, low-impact ger camp at Arburd Sands. Two nights in Ulaanbaatar at a centrally located hotel. All accommodation in double occupancy. Single room/tent/ger is available at the additional supplement cost USD 400.

Staff: An English-speaking Mongolian guide will accompany the group at all times. A cook will travel along with the camel cart caravan. In addition, the services of local herdsmen will be employed along with their animals. The horsemen will come from Badrakh's family. They follow a traditional lifestyle in the areas where we will be riding. If the group consists of four riders or more, we will also have a Mongolian doctor come along as part of the crew.

Meals: Our cook will prepare all the meals. We pride ourselves in having cooks adept at both western and Mongolian cooking on our trips. There are always vegetables available, and we have no problem accommodating vegetarians on this trip. For breakfast we can usually buy fresh yogurt from local herdsmen.

Minimum riding ability: You should be a competent rider, fit and capable of riding at all paces confidently. We will cover varying terrain, and will be in the saddle for several hours on most days.

Includes: Guide, breakfast every day in Ulaanbaatar, welcome and farewell dinner, all meals outside Ulaanbaatar, all overnights in hotels in shared double (2n), ger camps (2n) and tents (7n). Camping equipment and all local transport, local medevac coverage.

Excludes: Imported drinks, laundry, lunch in Ulaanbaatar, air or train tickets in and out of Mongolia, visa fee. Bring your own sleeping bag!

Reversal of trip: Trips may be done in the reverse for operational reasons.

Naadam: There is a Naadam Festival extension included in GSR02 for the National Naadam Games in Ulaanbaatar (July 10th-12th) at additional USD 720 per person. This option requires two additional nights in Ulaanbaatar before the ride.

For GSR03 it is possible to book an extension for the Danshig Naadam which includes Buddhist mask dances (Tsam) alongside the regular wrestling, archery and horse races. This option requires one additional night in Ulaanbaatar. Additional costs are USD 380 per person.

Please request information about these highly interesting options!

PRICE 2017 ex Ulaanbaatar:

USD 2400 per person (2/10 members)

Single room/tent/ger supplement: **USD 440**

Should you book this ride as a private trip, other language guides (French, German, Italian, Korean, etc.) are available upon request. Please enquire.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar: 2017

GSR01: 06-17Jun (Tu/Sa)

GSR02: 09Jul-22 Jul (Su/Sa) Naadam ext

GSR03: 26Jul-06Aug (We/Su)

GSR04: 20-31 Aug (Su/Th)

