



Photo: Maria Nordvall



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Photo: Ana Nordenstahl



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Photo: Haroldo Castro

Steppe Nomads Ride

- camel carts supported

This is a horseback journey across the Mongolian steppe lands hosted by the Steppe Nomads themselves, the largest remaining pastoralist people. We will saddle up and load all our gear onto a caravan of camel carts, and head out across the steppes on to the Gobi grasslands. 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 as it has patchy water sources, giving room for wildlife. Wolves may be heard vocalizing at any time in the summer, but usually, they are not seen. On this journey you won't have to squeeze yourself into a sleeping bag or a tent. The maximum group size is half of that of our regular horseback journeys, and all riders sleep in gers (Mongolian yurts) which are being moved by camel cart caravan to a new location every two days. This way you will be able to stay in the basic comforts of a bed (sturdy cot) with full linens, and a ger heated by a stove.

Day 1: Ulaanbaatar

Arrive at the Mongolian capital and transfer to your hotel. There will be a tour briefing and a welcome dinner.

Day 2: To The Grasslands

Before leaving the city we will visit the Gandan Monastery, the center for the buddhist revival in Mongolia. We will drive south and enjoy a picnic en route. Our small mobile Luxury Wilderness Camp of gers has been set up in the vast pastoralist landscape near a water source at Tseel. Our crew here are our hosts, the steppe nomads of the area. They have brought their horses and camel carts and if we arrive on time, we can saddle up and try the horses.

Day 3: To Hoyd Önjuul

Today we have our first full day ride to the rather high mountains of Hoyd Önjuul, seen in the distance to the west. It is a wilderness area with vertical rock faces, hills and mountains up to an elevation of about 1800 meters above sea level. Nomads do not come here much due to the lack of water sources. For this reason the area harbors some 400 Red Deer, and some Argali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*), the world's largest wild bighorn sheep. We are at the edge of the Gobi now. After exploring the area on horseback we ride back over the grasslands to our camp.



Day 4: To Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

Today we break up camp and all gers, provisions and luggage will be loaded on to the camel carts. While the camel caravan will move straight on to our next destination at the sacred mountains of Zorgol Hairkhan, we will ride a detour easterly across the fantastic grasslands to Bayan Mountain, home to Gobi high altitude fauna like Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) and Argali Sheep. They take shelter in the hills and rocks, and quite possibly, may be seen during this day. Moreover, small herds of gazelle might be seen on the steppe, perhaps some wolves. We will pitch camp at Zorgol Hairkhan and remain here for two nights.

Day 5: Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

The landscape is quite diverse here since we are in the transition zone of the Gobi, there is true steppe, semi arid steppe, and also giant rock formations. For the full day we will explore the Zorgol Hairkhan massif on horseback and ride around and through rock formations, several hundred meters high, a striking feature the middle of the 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. The Khan himself is said to have wintered here while in conflict with a competing leader. There is a breeding population of Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), the largest of the Eurasian vultures, it's size on par with the Condor of the Americas. Their nests are quite low, on rocks and in small trees, and very visible. We can also visit Khuh Sudliin Am, the valley of Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*). Mongolians use this circumpolar medicinal plant in traditional medicine for stomach problems, by making a tea from its red pod-like flower.

Day 6: To Saikhan

Again we break camp and the camel caravan starts moving in a straight line to our next destination at Saikhan, skirting Baga Zorgol Hairkhan Uul. Baga means "small", it is the smaller version of Ikh "big" Sacred Zorgol. Here we will probably encounter quite a few nomadic families, as we head for Hariin Nuur (Remote Lake), a steppe lake useful for the steppe nomads. Usually the lake attracts different species of birds. Our private camp has been set up already at Saikhan.

Day 7: Uushig

A full day ride takes us across the steppe to Uushig, which again is an uninhabited area, featuring a small spring and some spectacular rock formations. Here it is even more likely to spot Argali Sheep, Cinereous Vultures, Saker Falcons (*Falco cherrug*) and other wildlife. We will also be able to see some of the petroglyphs, for which Mongolia is so famous. We ride back to Saikhan for the night.

Day 8: To Arburd Sands

Today our camp is broken for the last time and we ride for half a day, across the Gobi grasslands to Arburd Sands. These are the northernmost sand dunes of Mongolia. Here we find a seasonal and fully collapsible low-impact ger camp. Instead of picnic lunch we will enjoy a hot lunch at camp. In the afternoon we will ride a short way to some seasonal steppe lakes, which are kept in place by the underlying permafrost. We can visit nomads with large herds of cattle, especially cashmere goats. We return to Arburd Sands Ger Camp for the night.

Day 9: Arburd Sands

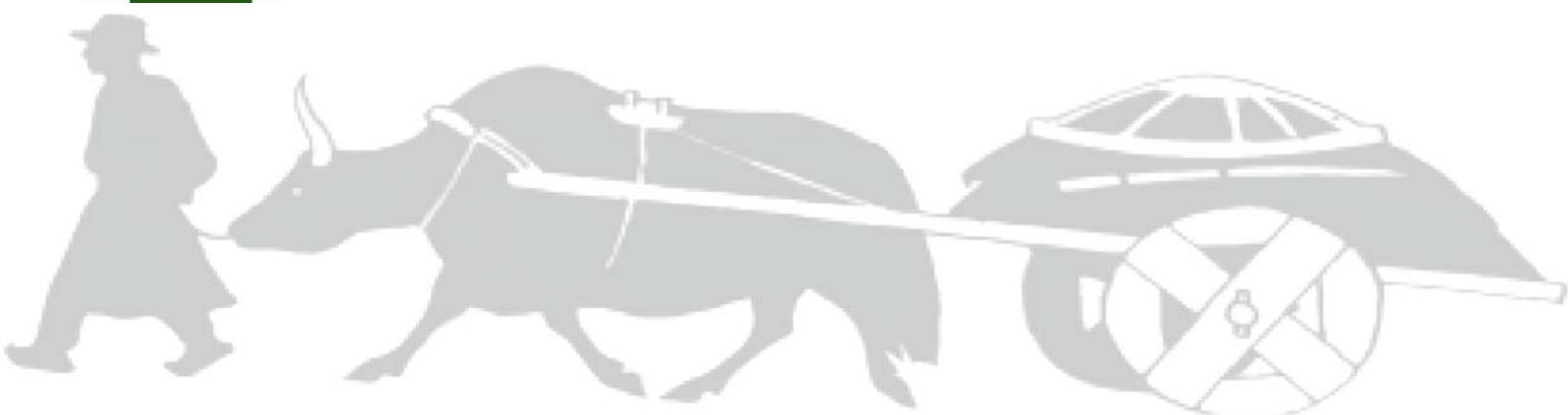
On our last day on the grasslands we will make a loop with the horses, riding across the 20km long Arburd Sands, which are a hideout for wolves. You may also relax back at camp. Today we bid farewell to our steppe nomads horsemen.

Day 10: To Ulaanbaatar

We return to Ulaanbaatar and check into the hotel. See the capital city on your own. Distances are short and nearly all points of interest can be reached by foot. Your guide is standing by to assist you in your shopping or sightseeing activities. We will have a farewell dinner in local restaurant and entertainment.

Day 11: Departure

Transfer to the airport, railway station or your next Mongolian destination.



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. Traveling with Nomadic Journeys means a shared adventure with horses and camel carts in the great outdoors, choosing the life of the nomad.

Transport: On this tour, apart from the short drive to the 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 use moving from one pasture to another. Here we will travel by camel carts and riding horses.

Accommodation: For this exclusive trip we carry with us a fully collapsible ger camp, including showers and compost toilets. The gers are each equipped with cot beds (including full linen), chairs and a table, and a wood burning stove. For two nights we stay at a low-impact ger camp at Arburd Sands. In Ulaanbaatar you will stay at the Bayangol Hotel in Deluxe Rooms. All accommodation in double occupancy.

Staff: A Mongolian English speaking guide will accompany the group at all times. A cook will follow with the camel cart caravan. In addition, the services of local herdsmen will be employed along with their animals. The horsemen 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 the meals. We pride ourselves in having excellent cooks adept at both western and Mongolian cooking on our trips. There is no problem accommodating vegetarians on our trips. We can usually buy fresh milk and yogurt from local herdsmen.

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

Naadam Games: There is a Naadam Festival extension possible for SNR02. There will be horseraces with almost 1000 race horses on the plains outside the city. As well as wrestling and archery. The cost is additional USD 720 per person.

Reversal of Trip: Riding tours may be done in the reverse for operational reasons.

There are other language guides such as Russian, French, German, Italian, Korean etc. available at additional cost, booked and confirmed ahead of time.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar:

2 - 6 members: **USD 3600 per person**

Single room/ger camp supplement(4n): **USD 160**

Single ger outing supplement (6n): **USD 1500**

Private trip supplement:

2/3 members **USD 500 per trip**

4/up members no charge

Includes: English speaking guide, breakfast every day in Ulaanbaatar, welcome and farewell dinner. All meals outside Ulaanbaatar. All overnights in hotels (2n.) gers (2n.) and tents (7n.) in shared double, camping equipment and all local transport.

Excludes: Beverages, laundry, lunch in Ulaanbaatar. Air or train tickets in and out of Mongolia. Bring your own riding helmet and short chaps.

DATES 2018 ex Ulaanbaatar:

SNR01: 19-29Jun (Tu/Fr)

SNR02: 30Jun-10Jul (Sa/Tu) Naadam opt

SNR03: 06-16Aug (Mo/Th) Danshig opt

SNR04: 07-17Sep (Fr/Mo)

