

Wonders of Mongolia & Naadam Festival | 14 Days



- Explore Central Mongolian Nature
- Explore Terelj and Khustai National Park
- Discover Gobi Desert and its beauties
- Explore Orkhon valley National Park
- Visit ancient capital city of Great Mongol Empire "Kharkhorin"
- Experience nomadic lifestyle
- Stay in local Ger camps and Lodge

Detailed Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive in Ulaanbaatar

Discovering intriguing Mongolia begins from its capital Ulaanbaatar, breathtaking nature of World Heritage Orkhon Valley and Singing sand dune.

This adventurous holiday combines all the highlights of Mongolia – from the busy capital Ulaanbaatar to the arid Gobi Desert and the land of Orkhon Valley. Mongolia's unique landscape and charming people will leave a memorable impression to all who dare to visit this land.

Arkhangai and Uvurkhongai provinces are located in the center region of Mongolia. Elsen tasarkhai is a unique sight to see, a desert surrounded with mountainous area. The Uvurkhongai Province includes World Heritage Center Orkhon Valley and numerous archaeological remains of the nomads. And the site of the ancient capital city of Chinggis Khan – Kharkhorin – the center of the largest Empire the World has ever known.

The Naadam Festival celebrates the 'three games of men' (or Erin Gurvan Naadam) which are wrestling, horse racing and archery. More recently a fourth game, knuckle-bone flicking was added to the competitions. The festival is celebrated throughout the country but the biggest festival is in Ulaanbaatar.

Trip Highlights

- Observe and enjoy The Naadam Festival (Erin Gurvan Naadam) – three games of men that include wrestling, horse racing, archery and knuckle-bone flicking.

Welcome to Mongolia! Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar (also known as 'UB') a *travel-to-nature Asia* guide/representative will be at the airport to greet and take us to our hotel. Please look out for your name-card once you exit out of arrival area.

We will base ourselves here for the first night. There are no activities planned for today. However, if we arrive into Ulaanbaatar early, we have time this afternoon to enjoy some introductory city walking through Genghis Khaan Square, Sukhbaatar Square, the National Historical Museum.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel

Meal: Dinner

Day 2: Khustai National park (110 km)

Today, we drive towards Kharkhorin, making a detour to the Khustain Nuruu National Park, 2 hours west of Ulaan Baatar. Khustain Nuruu is famous for the re-introduction of Mongolia's wild horse. The Mongolian Government declared Hustai National Park as a Specially Protected Area in 1993, one year after the initiation of the reintroduction project of the Takhi (Przewalski's horse) to the Hustain Nuruu. The Takhi Horse was once native to Mongolia and almost became extinct earlier in the 20th century. Through the efforts of several Mongolian and international organizations, these magnificent wild horses now roam in the steppes of the national park once again. We will visit the Project Information Centre and drive inside the park to see the wild horses and more.

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Khustai national park is home to 459 species of vascular plants, 85 species of lichens, 90 species of moss and 33 species of mushrooms. 44 species of mammals have been recorded, including red deer, Mongolian gazelle, roe deer, wild boar, wild sheep, ibex, Mongolian marmots, grey wolves, Eurasian lynx, Pallas cat, red fox, corsac fox and Eurasian badger. The 217 species of birds include golden eagle, lammergeier, great bustard, whooper swan, black stork, Daurian partridge and little owl. There are 16 species of fish, 2 species of amphibians, and 385 species of insects (including 21 species of ants, 55 species of butterflies, 10 species of bush crickets and 29 species of grasshoppers). A new species of soil insect has been found in the Hustai and given the scientific name of *Epidamaeus khustaiensis*.

In 2002, the Man and the Biosphere Reserves organization of UNESCO certified the HNP as a member of the world biosphere network of natural reserves. The HNPT was enrolled as a member of IUCN in 2007.

Accommodation: Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3: Drive to Karakorum - Visit Erdene Zuu Monastery

Today we leave early to reach the Karakorum to explore 13th century capital of the Mongol Empire. We will make a brief stop to see the dunes of the Little Gobi along the way.

In the afternoon we visit the capital city of ancient Great Mongol Empire. The city was established in 1220 by Ogedei Khan and remained the Mongols power base until Khublai Khan established Beijing as the capital. Kharakhorum was the capital of Mongolia for 140 years and the capital of the Mongol Empire for 32 years.

The Erdenezuu monastery and the ruins of Kharakhorum were registered by UNESCO as world heritage in 1996. Major tourist attractions include Erdenezuu monastery, newly built Kharakhorum museum, open museum and mosaic map of Chinggis Khaan. Erdene Zuu (Hundred Treasures) monastery

was the largest Monastery in Mongolia, built in 1586 under the direction of Abtai Khan on the ruins of the ancient capital. Much of the monastery was destroyed during Stalin's purges of the 1930's, but an impressive wall with 108 stupas and a number of temples still remains.

Accommodation: Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 4: Drive Kharkhorum - Orkhon Valley (1,500 m) - Talbiun lodge

After our leisurely breakfast we continue our journey south-west to Orkhon valley, the heartland of ancient nomads. We will arrive for lunch at Talbiun Lodge located at the scenic spot above on a steep cliff of Orkhon River in Khaalgan Denj, Uvurkhantai province. the heartland of ancient nomads. We will be based in a comfortable Talbiun lodge for couple of nights.

Afternoon we will explore the camp area around. We shouldn't need to go far to find nesting some interesting birds, such as Rock Sparrow, Small Snowfinch and Upland Buzzard in the direct vicinity of our camp. We'll then make our way around the southern edge of the cliff to look for the stone formation near the bank of the river, stopping to scan the river itself. Here we also have our chance to visit a Nomad family to observe the nomadic way of life, taste milk products, including airag (fermented mares milk) and interact with the nomad family.

Accommodation: Talbiun Lodge/Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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Day 5: Exolore Orkhan Valley Nature & Cultural Highlights

Eternal Elbow /Temeen Chuluu/ The Orkhon Waterfall /Tuvkhun Temple

Today we will drive through and try to visit one or more of these fascinating Natural history sites in Orkhon Valley.

Uurtiin Tohoi - Mongolian for "Eternal Elbow", this is a steep cliff bordering a right angled bend of Orkhon River. Located at 1630 meter above sea level and originally named Khuurtiin Tokhoi, the cliff offers a marvelous view over Orkhon Valley.



Then Grave stones Temeen Chuluu : Temeen Chuluu burial site is on the many burial sites around camp Talbiun. The surrounding area has many tombs and burial mounds belong to the Bronze Age.

The Orkhon Waterfall : Water flows for remarkable 1120 km to the North and lies in the historically significant Orkhon Valley, UNESCO World Heritage site. The waterfall formed by combination volcanic eruption and earthquakes some 20000 years ago cascades down from a height 27 meters. There are many rocks and boulders around the river as well as some waterfalls like a small waterfall with 4-5 m height and the Ulaan Tsutgalan waterfall is the biggest in Mongolia at a height of 27m.

Having spent a full day out in Orkhon Valley enjoying the nomadic culture and historical sites, we shall make our way back to our ger camp for overnight.

Accommodation: Talbiun Lodge/Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6: Drive to Arvaikheer (1,817 m) via Shankh Monastery

Today, we drive along the paved road Arvaikheer to the capital of Ovorkhangai Aimag on the northern edge of the Gobi Desert. On the way we will visit the Shankh (Tuvkhun) Monastery, once the home of the great Mongolian theologian Zanabazar.

This monastery was built in 1654 by Saint Zanabazar who was a great sculptor and one of the biggest representatives of Buddhism in Mongolia. The creation work temple dedicated to religious study and art works became the foundation of today's Tuvkhun Monastery. It is located on a rocky mountain hill surrounded by forests elevated in 2300 meters above sea level. In 1651, the first religious statesman Zanabazar built a small stony building. In 1648, about the time he had found what now Shankh monastery on the Shariin gol, Zanabazar noticed an unusual armchair-shaped peak among the ridges west of the Orkhon River. He soon concluded that the mountain, known as Shireet Ulaan Uul, was an auspicious spot. Upon his return in 1651 from his first trip to Tibet he had a small walled stone meditation hut built here. In 1653, he visited Erdenezuu, founded by his great grandfather, and appeared before a convocation of khal nobility. While there he prevailed upon his followers to build temple and retreat at Shireet Ulaan Uul in his own personal use. Later it became a place of worship where many of his famous artworks were created; including five transcendent Buddha's now located in the Zanabazar Fine Art Museum and Chojjim Lama Museum. Zanabazar also reportedly designed his Soyombo Alphabet while residing here. During Zanabazar's lifetime retreat was called Bayasgalant Aglag Oron (Happy Secluded Place.)

We should arrive at Arvaikheer during the middle of the afternoon and check in to our hotel. In the afternoon there will be time to visit the local museum, which contains nature collections, stone figures and Turkic scripts and possibly go to a local market.

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Accommodation: Arvaikheer Palace Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7: Drive to Bayan Gobi Adventure via Mt Ikh Bogd

Today is a long day as we head off the tourist route into some of the wilder parts of the Gobi Desert. After an early breakfast we start our adventurous journey and rapidly leave the tarmac behind. The landscape changes as we head deeper into the Gobi and the majestic Ikh Bogd Mountain should be visible in the distance, the highest mountain in the Gobi Altai Mountain Range. Eventually, after about 8-9 hours travelling (with stops) we will arrive at our Ger Camp in the wilderness. This is the longest day's driving in this trip but is also a definite highlight of the trip as we pass through some of Mongolia's most spectacular landscape.

Accommodation: Ger Camp

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8: Cross the Gobi via White Cave

Today, we crossover a desert pass and visiting the quartz rich 'White Cave' and continue through classic Gobi desert scenery of flat stony plains mixed with small rocky outcrops and patches of sand across the Khatan Suudal Steppe. We stop for a picnic lunch on the way, with views of Arts Bogd mountain to the north. We head off to the Kongoriin Els sand dunes and arrive there in the late afternoon. Rest of the free for rest and enjoy the magic of the Gobi desert.

Accommodation: Ger Camp

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9: Visit the Khongoriin Els 'singing' sand dunes - the largest dunes in Mongolia

We have a full day to explore the sand dunes and surrounding area.

The Khongoriin Els stretch for 200km and are as high as 300m in places. They are known as the 'Singing Dunes' because of the beautiful sound that resonates

through the dunes on a windy day. The spectacular dunes are bordered by lush green vegetation supported by a small river Khongor, which is fed by underground sources from surrounding mountains. The South Gobi has 100,000 camels, typically used by herders for transportation of their gers. We will have the opportunity today to visit a camel breeding family and get a glimpse of the way of life of the nomadic herders of these parts.

Accommodation: Ger Camp

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 10: Travel through rocky plains of Gobi Gurvansaikhan N.P.

This morning we will drive through the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. Gobi Gurvansaikhan means 'Three Beauties of the Gobi' and this range marks the eastern end of the Gobi Altai mountain range. The park's landscape is extremely varied, with rocky and sandy desert plains, precipitous cliffs and ravines, salt pans and oases.

It's one of the natural secret of Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park and beautiful deep canyon with many rocky cliffs, has been created by many years of water erosion. We visit a spectacular natural sight of this region - Yolyn Ama a protected site established in 1965, is 62 km north west of Dalanzadgad. Yolyn Am means Vulture's Mouth and is a canyon so deep and narrow that even in the height of summer winter ice can remain on the valley floor. This region is also renowned for the diversity of its wildlife and many endangered species can be found here, including Khulan, Ibex, Argali, elusive Snow leopards and many

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birds of prey, as well as numerous small rodents particular to the Gobi. The walk along canyon must be done on foot.

After exploring the canyon, we will visit a small museum marks the entrance to the protected zone and provides information on the petrified trees, fauna and flora of the Gobi drive to a nearby ger camp for dinner and overnight.

Accommodation: Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 11: Explore Bayanzag the 'Flaming Cliffs'

Today we have time to relax in our ger camp. Either in the morning or afternoon we take a short drive to Bayanzag (70 km). Known as the Flaming cliffs, the red/ochre colour can be striking and we have the opportunity for a short hike amongst colourful sands of red, yellow and orange. Bayanzag is a world-renowned dinosaur fossil exploration site, discovered in the 1920s by Mongolian and American palaeontologists. We are free to explore the region and may even be lucky enough to spot dinosaur fossils. We later return to our ger camp.

Accommodation: Ger Camp
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12: Fly to Ulaan Baatar

We leave the Gobi Desert behind and fly back to Ulaan Baatar. Depending on what time our flight is will determine what time we get back to Ulaan Baatar. After refreshing from the trip, we will have a city tour with travel-to-nature Asia partners, visit Gobi

Cashmere and souvenir showroom, the largest in Mongolia. In the evening our partner will host a dinner by A Star Mongolia LLC.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13: Naadam Festival

The Naadam Festival celebrates the 'three games of men' (or Erin Gurvan Naadam) which are wrestling, horse racing and archery. More recently a fourth game, knuckle-bone flicking was added to the competitions. The festival is celebrated throughout the country but the biggest festival is in Ulaan Baatar.

Over the next two days, we attend the grand opening ceremony before we watch Mongolians compete in all four sports. We also get to mingle with hordes of Mongolian spectators as the grounds around the stadium (where wrestling, archery and bone-flicking take place) and the horse races are filled with stands selling food, games, flags and various other things.

The atmosphere is a big part of the experience and many Mongolians dress in their best traditional clothes for the occasion.

In 2010 the festival was entered into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list and is a great celebration of the Central Asian nation's culture.

Accommodation: Bayangol Hotel or similar
Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14: Depart Ulaanbaatar

Your trip ends here today. Sadly, we will transfer you to the airport for your flight back home.

Meal: Breakfast

Includes

- Airport transfers
- 11 nights in Ger Lodges (twin/double bed)

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- 2 nights in hotel in sharing basis
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary
- Entrance fees and taxes of National Parks, museums and tourist attractions according to the program, travel permits
- A local tour guide
- Car with a driver
- Domestic flight Dalanzadgad-Ulaanbaatar

Excludes

- International flight tickets
- Visa fee
- Travel insurance
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Personal clothing and equipment
- Tips for trip leader/guide, driver, hotel staff and porters
- Items of personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, laundry, and other unforeseen expenses
- Items/services not listed in "included"
- Extra expenses/payment for 'Optional' activities/programs if participated

Accommodation

Bayangol Hotel, Ulanbaatar

Bayangol Hotel opened its doors since 1964 and it has always played a significant role in the Mongolian tourism and hospitality industry. Since its privatization 1991, it was the first privately owned and managed hotel in Mongolia. Our 4 star property has been the preferred lodging for royalty, as well as tourists and business guests.

Arvaikheer Palace Hotel

The Arvaikheer Palace Hotel has deluxe, semi-deluxe, standard and simple rooms. We are offering for guest pubs, karaoke, restaurants, and snooker billiard rooms. All rooms have cable TV, internet, underwear, 24-hour hot and cold shower. There are also 20-30 car parks, 20 car heaters and auto wash. Restaurants

and pubs have the capacity to accommodate 70-100 people in one place.

Ger Camp

Usually made out of lightweight felt tarp covering a wooden framework a Ger Camp is a simple accommodation yet cozy and comfortable. Ger camp is the traditional tent house suitable for nomadic life of Mongolians. Staying in a ger provides a window of opportunity to experience this unique way of life that will make a trip to Mongolia even richer.



Talbiun Lodge

Talbiun Lodge provides two-bed accommodation in ordinary and luxury yurts, can accommodate 80-100 guests, and has 24-hr hot showers and toilets. The camp also includes a restaurant. Talbiun Lodge, which is connected to the central power grid, is located northeast of Uurtiin tokhoi and 410 kilometers from Ulaanbaatar.

Group/Individual

On this trip you will be traveling privately with your family & friends. Our representative/tour partner will look after your transfers to and from the airport and will be around to answer other questions you may have about your trip.

Accommodation - Hotel, Resort

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a fine heritage hotel in another or a family-run guesthouse or lodges in a smaller town. Accommodation in remote areas tend to be basic and may not have western amenities. You will also be staying in a

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traditional yurt-like tents called Ger Camp which nomads of Mongolia used for centuries.

Single Accommodation

Single (room) supplement is provided on request (single supplement charge applies) and are subject to availability.

Food & Transport

All breakfasts, 13 lunches and 13 dinners are included.

Traditional Mongolian diets are very meat and dairy heavy. Whilst there will be opportunities to try some of these products such as dry-curd and fermented mare's milk, the meals provided in the ger camps are generally western meals, at times with an Asian influence. There will normally be some form of soup and salad as well as a main course and desert. Vegetarians are generally well catered for, if you are vegetarian or have other dietary requirements, please make sure to inform us in advance. Breakfasts can vary from place to place, some are buffet style whilst others are set, normally cereal, bread and possibly a hot dish will be provided. On some days a pack lunch will be provided, this is often still a proper meal (though without the soup). Water is provided and will generally be from 5L water-containers so make sure to bring a water bottle to decant into. Tea, coffee, soft drinks, beer, vodka and (most of the time) wine are available to buy at the ger camps. There is opportunity to buy snacks in Ulaanbaatar and on a couple other occasions along the way when we drive through towns or villages.

For airport, sightseeing transfers, and for long drives we use a private air-con car, jeep, van depending upon group size. Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

Weather

Mongolia has a continental climate, with long, cold winters and short, mild summers. The country is known for its extreme temperature variations, with temperatures ranging from -40°C (-40°F) in the winter to 30°C (86°F) in the summer. Most of the precipitation falls in the summer months, with the rest of the year being very dry.

The weather in Mongolia can vary greatly depending on the region, as the country is vast and diverse. For example, the Gobi Desert in southern Mongolia is one of the driest places on Earth, while the northern region near Lake Khovsgol is much cooler and receives more precipitation.

Baggage Allowance

At time of writing the standard weight limit is one checked baggage is 25kg (55lb) and hand baggage 7kg (15lbs). We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage. Luggage allowances for both hand and checked luggage are subject to change, we suggest you check the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

ESSENTIAL/PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Passport & Visas

All nationalities require a passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Visitors (tourist) from EU, UK and US do not need a visa to enter Malaysia.

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Please note: Visa regulations can change without notice and it is your responsibility to obtain any required visas for this trip. Therefore, we recommend that you check with the nearest embassy or consulate of your chosen destination(s), including any countries you may be transiting or transferring through.

Vaccination & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements. However, there are some recommendations for vaccinations: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid, rabies, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis), chickenpox, shingles, pneumonia, and influenza.

Please confirm your vaccine recommendations and requirements with your doctor or travel clinic.

Dengue and zika fevers, both spread by mosquitoes, are known risks in places visited. There are currently no vaccines or prophylaxes available; therefore, we recommend you take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

Local Time

UTC/GMT + 8 hours.

Electricity

Malaysia operates on 230V and 50 Hz. Mongolia has two associated plug types: type C and E. Type C has two round pins and used widely in Europe that's why it is also known as 'Euro-plug'. Type E plug has two round pins and a hole for the earth pin.

Money

The Mongolian currency is tugrik (MNT). MNT banknotes comes from 1 to 20,000 and coins from 20

to 500. One Euro is roughly equivalent to MNT 3,900 and one US\$ to 3500 MNT.

ATM | Credit Cards

ATM's are widely available in Ulaanbaatar and some other major towns and can withdraw cash but these can incur a relatively large fee so it's best to check with your card issuer before travelling.

You may want to notify your bank before leaving home, as some will automatically cancel your card after withdrawals from exotic destinations as a fraud prevention method.

The more remote areas have few or no ATM's so it is worth planning your expenditure to ensure you have enough money to survive in these areas.

Most major credit cards (Visa & MasterCard) are accepted in most hotels, shops and restaurants in and around Ulaanbaatar.

Extra Expenses & Spending Money

You will need to bring some extra money to cover drinks, laundry, souvenirs and any other personal expense, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Though it totally depends on individual but generally an approximate amount of US\$150 per person, per week should be sufficient (more if you enjoy a few beers); however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount. Or if you are the one frugal with money probably allocating less would also be suffice.

Optional Tours may be offered in some city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each optional tour/activity will be arranged locally by our local partner/guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

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Tipping

Tipping is of course entirely at your discretion and in Mongolia, tipping is not considered conventional traditionally; however, Mongolians working in tourism-related fields (guides, drivers, bellhops and waiters at restaurants frequented by foreigners) are becoming more open to receiving tips.

Itinerary Change

In case of some unusual events/incidents the order of programs (sightseeing, excursions etc.) might have to change in order to accommodate the local situations. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements while maintaining the overall integrity of your trip.

The domestic airlines may change their schedule frequently and, in such cases, our local partner/guide will inform you about the changes.

Travel Insurance

We highly recommend to choose/get an insurance plan/policy that covers your needs. And please make sure to keep/carry a hard-copy of your travel insurance documents on your person while on tour. It's prudent to check thoroughly the inclusions and procedure to file claims prior to purchasing insurance coverage. *travel-to-nature Asia* will not be responsible for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to purchase appropriate travel insurance from the date of booking.

Important Information

On all guided trips although our leaders/guides are well trained to deal with different capabilities, if they have any concerns about someone's ability to safely partake in an activity, or their impact on other people's enjoyment, we authorize them to take necessary action which, in some circumstances, may involve asking someone to miss that activity.
