



Photo: Ana Nordenstahl



Photo: Andrea Pregonan



Photo: Ana Nordenstahl



Photo: Polar Quest

The Gobi Steppes - Arburd Sands

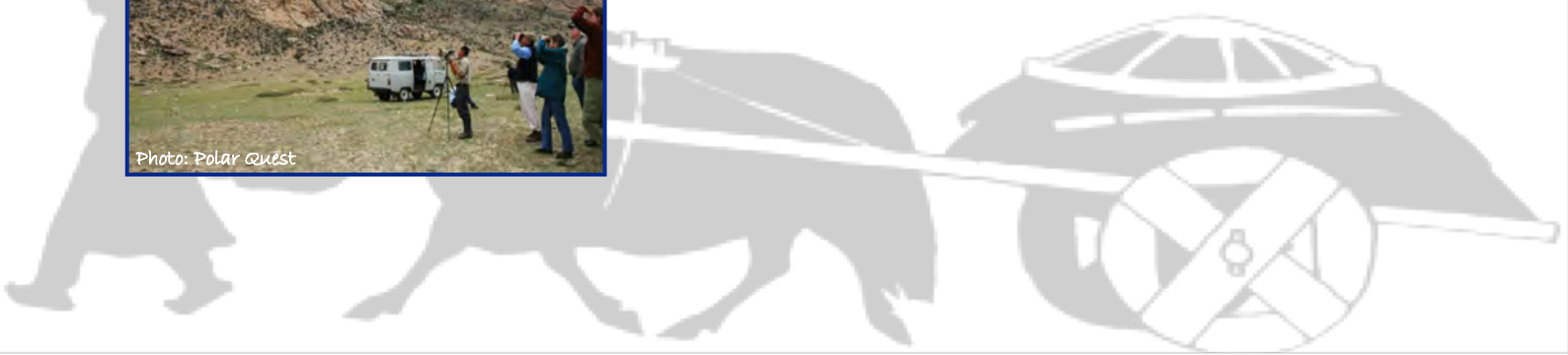
Surprisingly close to the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar one finds the northernmost reaches of the Gobi steppes; treeless grasslands stretching to the horizon and beyond. We will explore Arburd Sands, an area where the steppe, dotted with nomads' camps, slowly gives way to sand, culminating in a 20 km long sand dune. Close-by, Zorgol Hairkhan Uul, a gigantic rock formation rising almost vertically out of the plains, is habitat to Argali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*) and sometimes Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*). It is a place of great natural beauty, fraught with history and legends. The Mongolian nomadic steppe culture is still intact here. All of the herdsmen lead a traditional way of life, raising herds of horses, cows, sheep, goats and camels. Nomadic Journeys has a low-impact, fully collapsible ger (yurt) camp here, owned and operated by a local family. They are famous horse trainers who regularly participate in the annual Naadam Games and also operate our Gobi Steppe Ride and Steppe Nomads Ride. Their herd of horses is large and offers an ample selection for both the amateur and the competent rider. There are no other ger camps anywhere nearby, as few tourists actually come here.

Day 1: To Arburd Sands

In the morning we pick you up at your hotel. We drive south across the treeless steppe for some two to three hours to Arburd Sands. We arrive at the camp before lunch. In the afternoon we visit some nomadic families in the vicinity of our camp.

Day 2: Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

We drive 35 km across the steppe to the Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains, emerging almost vertically out of the middle of the steppe. En route we will find some secluded petroglyphs of extraordinary quality. We will explore the area and perhaps have a chance to spot the rare and elusive Argali Sheep, the largest wild mountain sheep in the world. There is also a chance to see Siberian Ibex on the ridges, though we need some luck to see them. Zorgol Hairkhan is a sacred mountain, already mentioned in the Secret History of the Mongols, the oldest surviving literary work in Mongolian language. There are many traces of holy sites here, such as caves and springs, where local people make offerings.





Day 3: Arburd Sands

Today we explore the immediate surroundings of Arburd Sands. We may hike or use camels or horses to ride through the middle of the sand dunes which extend for 20 km. Strangely enough, a good number of Wolves - being wary of man - have taken refuge in the sand dunes and can sometimes be seen. We will most likely meet some herdsman and will no doubt be invited into their gers and learn about their ancient lifestyle.

Day 4: To Ulaanbaatar

After breakfast we drive back to Ulaanbaatar. Check into your hotel and explore the city on your own. Distances are short and nearly all points of interest can be reached by foot.

Practicalities

Transport: A Russian van or minibus will take us to and from Arburd Sands and to Zorgol Hairkhan Mountain.

Low Impact Ger Camp: A Nomadic Journeys is committed to the principles of Sustainable Tourism. We bring additional jobs to the area, that are based on traditional livelihoods. These involve provision of camel carts, riding camels, pack horses, riding horses and labor. The camp purchases milk and yoghurt from the nearby herders. There is a maximum capacity for 28 guests in double occupancy gers. Vehicles are parked a short walk away from the gers. The entire camp is fully collapsible and does not have shower or WC blocks. The toilets are long drop style allowing for natural decomposition. Showers are housed in a small gers, water is heated on a wood burning stove. All trash is separated. The camp can be relocated leaving no more impact on the area than a herding family would. Arburd Sands Ger Camp is indeed a fully collapsible hotel.

Staff: An English speaking Mongolian guide will accompany you at all times. The camp staff consists of an English speaking camp manager, a cook and several local employees. Additionally the services of local herdsman can be employed to provide riding horses or transport animals.

Meals: The meals will be provided in the Ger camp restaurant, or as picnic lunches.

Riding skills: Complete horse riding novices should not attempt to ride individually on horses. However, as the Mongols historically were the most equestrian people on Earth and remain so today, anyone at ease with horses will enjoy riding here. Use of riding horses is included in the tour cost. If you are a keen and competent horse rider, please let us know beforehand, so that we can pre-arrange the right horse for you. For this, we need your age, height and weight in advance. You should moreover be insured for this activity. Mongolian horses are peculiar and horsemanship is somewhat different among the Mongols from what it is back home. We suggest that you bring your own riding helmet with you, since it could be difficult to find one that would have a proper fit in Mongolia.

Includes: Guide. All meals outside Ulaanbaatar. All overnights in double occupancy gers. All local transport and transfers to/from Ulaanbaatar. Riding horse / camel.

Excludes: Imported drinks. Laundry. International air or train fare. Hotel accommodation in Ulaanbaatar. Visa fee.

For your convenience, Nomadic Journeys may organize hotel accommodation and transfer in Ulaanbaatar at current rates.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar

USD 700 per person (min 2 members)

Single Supplement: **USD 120 per person**

Group discounts available on request for 6 persons or more.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar:

Daily May 20th to September 22nd.

