



Gobi Steppe Ride



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" in wild terrain. All our luggage will be loaded onto support vehicle; and 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 Suman

Pick up the guests from hotel and visit the Gandan lamasery, possibly in time for the prayers, center for the Buddhist revival in Mongolia. The Mongols follow the Tibetan version of Lamaism, Dalai Lama being the supreme theocratical leader. We will drive south and enjoy a picnic en route. Our crew here are your hosts, the steppe nomads of the area. They have brought their horses for our use and will accompany us throughout this ride. In the late afternoon we will make a short trial ride.

Day 3: Suman

We will stay one more night here. We will undertake a full day ride on the Gobi grasslands with a 360° degrees indisturbed landscape view until the horizon.

Day 4: To Ikh Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

Today we break the camp and the yurt/ger we brought along as our restaurant and social area. Provisions and luggage will be loaded on to the support vehicle. While the support 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 Ar-gali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*). 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 foxes. There are also wolves, but they are almost never spotted. 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 giant rock formations. For the full day we will explore the Zorgol Hairkhan massif with its vertical rock walls, on horseback and ride around and through rock formations, several hundred meters high, a striking feature the middle of the flat steppe.



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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, its 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 Hökh 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 support car 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" 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: To Bumbat

A full-day ride takes us across the steppe to Bumbat, which again is an uninhabited area, featuring 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.

Day 8: Bumbat

We will stay one more night here. Full day riding.



Photos: Bertrand Sinsaine

Day 9: 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 unknown Gobi sand dunes within proximity of Ulaanbaatar. Here we will 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 10: Arburd Sands

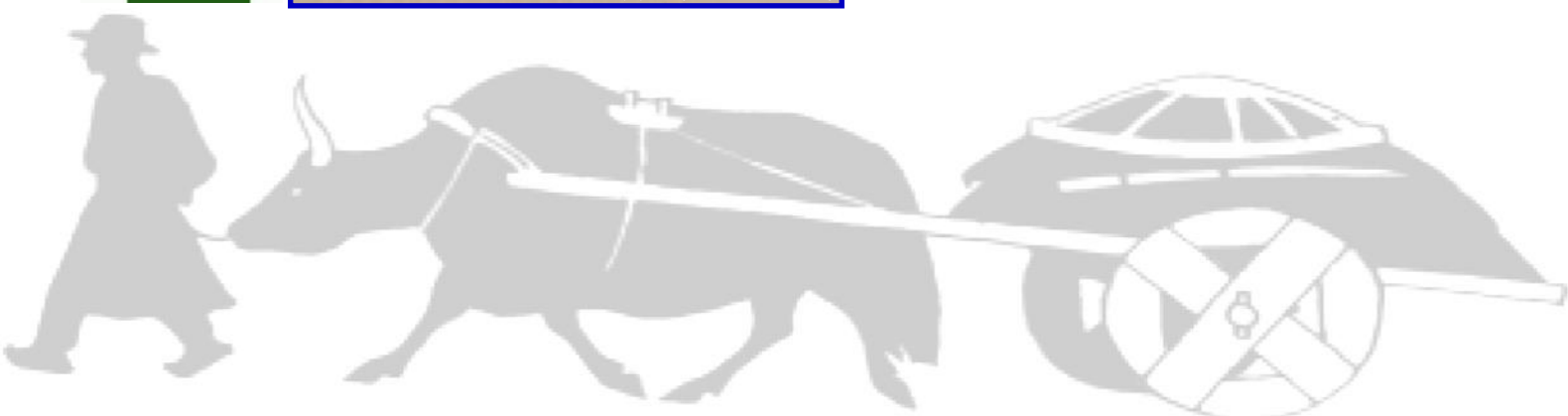
On our last day on the grasslands, we will make a loop with the horses, riding across the 20km long Arburd Sands, which are a hideout for wolves. You may also relax back at camp. Today we bid farewell to our steppe nomad's horsemen.

Day 11: 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 on foot. Your guide is standing by to assist you in your shopping or sightseeing activities.

Day 12: Departure

Driver will pick up the guests from Bayangol hotel and transfer to Chinghis Khaan International Airport for fly out.



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.

Transport: On this tour, we will have support vehicle for luggage transfers. There will be around one to two spare horse for the riders on this journey

Accommodation: During the horse riding trip we will stay in spacious tentipis, with foldable bed-cots. Bring your own sleeping bag. We take along a Mongolian ger (yurt) to serve as our mobile restaurant, as well as showers and compost toilets housed in traditional Mongolian marquee style tents. For two nights we stay at own low-impact ger camp at Arburd Sands. Two nights in Ulaanbaatar at a centrally located hotel. All accommodation in double occupancy.

Staff: A Mongolian English speaking guide will accompany the group at all times. A cook will follow with the support car. In addition, the services of local herdsman 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 five 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 herdsman.

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.

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.

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

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar:

2 - 10 members: **USD 2900 per person**
Single supplement (11n): **USD 550**

Private trip supplement:

2/4 members **USD 500 per trip**

5/up members no charge

DATES 2025 ex Ulaanbaatar:

GSR01: 19 - 30 Jun (Thu/Mon)

GSR02: 20 - 31 Jul (Sun/Thu)

GSR03: 19 - 30 Aug (Tue/Sat)

