



Mongolian Odyssey

The most classic of all our journeys in Mongolia. It combines some of the major sights around the country. It will take you to both desert steppe and mountain areas of the Gobi. We will visit the site of the ancient capital Karakorum, located in the Orkhon valley - the cradle of Mongol civilization. Erdene Zuu, the first and one of the biggest monasteries of Mongolia is located here. In the South Gobi we will explore the famous Flaming Cliffs, the majestic Hongor Sands and the Yol Valley in the Gurvansaikhan Mountains, which mark the extension of the Altai Mountains deep into the Gobi. This journey is completely vehicle based and provides relative comfort, as this route has a string of better than usual ger camps.



Day 1: To Högnö Khan Mountain

After a morning visit to Gandan Monastery, the center for Buddhist revival in Mongolia, we leave Ulaanbaatar and head west. We have a picnic lunch en route, once we come onto the open grasslands. Then we continue our journey to Högnö Khan Mountain and will arrive at the camp before dinner time.



Photo: Fredrik Sträng

Day 2: Högnö Khan Mountain

Today we explore the Högnö Khan Mountains. We visit the small and recently rebuilt Erdenekhamba Temple. It is also possible to hike a short way to the ruins of Övgön Monastery, located in a green oasis hidden in the mountains. We stay a second night at the ger camp near Högnö Khan Mountain.

Day 3: To Erdenezuu & Karakorum

In the morning we drive 2 hours to visit Erdene Zuu Monastery - Mongolia's first Buddhist monastery established in the late 16th century. Within its 400 by 400 meters long walls, it once housed 62 temples and 1000 monks were performing religious duties. Today only the three oldest temples remain and about 40 monks are in residence. At once a museum and a fully functioning monastery, Erdene Zuu is still one of the most fascinating sites of Mongolia. Usually we will be able to see the prayers. On a hill outside the monastery sits an interestingly shaped rock - a reminder for the monks to remain celibate. We also visit the Karakorum Museum, by far the best museum outside of Ulaanbaatar, which chronicles the history of the Khan Empire and displays many artifacts from the ruined city.



Photos: Mark Johnstad

Day 4: To Ongiin Monastery

We drive south for the full day. The landscape slowly changes, vegetation becomes sparser as we make our way into the Gobi. The spectacular ruins of Ongiin Monastery are located in a rocky desert landscape alongside the Ongi River near the district center of Saikhan Ovoo. Usually, the Ongi River is just a dry river bed. We will stay at the Secrets of Ongi Ger Camp for the night.



Day 5: To Bayanzag

After breakfast we explore the extensive Ongii Monastery ruins before driving half day to Bayanzag. We will come through 'forests' of Saxaul trees. This salt-resistant little tree grows in sandy deserts from Egypt to Mongolia. In Middle Asia it usually grows scattered, only here in northern Central Asia does it often form 'saxaul forests'. On arrival we visit the so-called "Flaming Cliffs", a name coined by American explorer Roy Chapman Andrews, whose expedition found the first ever fossilized dinosaur eggs in the 1920s. Red and orange hues come together to create an awe-inspiring sight. Home to ancient dinosaur fossils, the Bayanzag area is an exciting destination. We spend the night in a comfortable ger camp.

Day 6: To Hongor Sands

We continue southwest for 150km through the mountains, and keep our eyes peeled for spectacular wildlife. The snow leopard, and its main prey species, the Siberian ibex and the Argali sheep all inhabit this area. We reach Hongor Sands, located in the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. In the late afternoon or evening we visit the large dunes, whose beautiful shapes best come out in the evening light. In June the sunset is very late, after dinner time.

Day 7: To Gurvansaikhan Mountains

We travel eastwards along the Gurvansaikhan Mountains for half the day. The Gurvansaikhan range, literally 'three beauties' named for its three subranges, is an extension of the Altai deep into the Gobi desert. The highest peaks reach up to 2.800 m above sealevel.

Day 8: Gurvansaikhan Mountains

We go on a full day excursion to the Yol Valley, the central part of which forms a deep ravine, which is often covered with ice and snow until early summer. Bird watching is rewarding here as you are sure to see the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), also known as Lammergeier, soaring high above the ravine. Yol is actually the Mongolian name for this large bird. There are also several species of Rose Finch, and usually also the Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*). We return to camp for lunch and continue on to Muhar Shiver. This area is famous for its rocks that look like various animals, and it has some winter ice left at the end of the canyon.

Day 9: To Ulaanbaatar

We'll be transferred to Dalanzadgad airport and take the flight to Ulaanbaatar by domestic airline (1½ hours). Upon arrival you are transferred to the hotel.

Practicalities

Transport: This tour is supported by a jeep or minibus depending on number of travelers. In June and September there are no daily flights to/from Dalanzadgad, so the trip may reverse.

Accommodation: We stay in Ger (yurt) Camps for the duration of this trip. These permanent camps are equipped with a restaurant and shared bathroom and shower blocks. Along the way there are a few camps which offer attached facilities, for which you may pay an upgrade supplement. Moreover, you may upgrade further to the luxurious Three Camel Lodge, located near Bayanzag, for two of the overnights.

Staff: An English-speaking Mongolian guide will accompany you at all times. Other language guides such as Russian, French, German, Italian, Korean etc. available at additional cost, upon request.

Meals: The meals will be provided in the ger camps, or as picnic lunches

Additional: We can organize hotel accommodation, city tours and transfers in Ulaanbaatar.

Private departures: This is a fixed dated departure intended for independent travelers to join. On request, the trip may operate on any day, at an additional supplement cost. Private departures may further be customized, adding days at Hongor Sands, Ongiin Monastery ruin, Orkhon Valley with Tovkhon Monastery and Hustai national Park.

PRICES ex Ulaanbaatar:

2-12 members: **USD 2900 per person**
Single supplement (8): **USD 400**

Private trip supplement:
2/4 members **USD 600 per trip**
5/up members no charge

Upgrade supplement:
Deluxe Gers (7n): **USD 840 per person**
Three Camel Lodge (2n): **USD 1560 per person**

Includes: Guide, all meals outside Ulaanbaatar. All overnights in ger camps. All local transport and entrance fees. Domestic flight tickets.

Excludes: Beverages. Transfers and accommodation in Ulaanbaatar. Air or train tickets in and out Mongolia.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar:

GKM01: 23Jun-01Jul (Mon/ Tue)
GKM02: 01-09Jul (Tue/ Wed)(Naadam avl)
GKM03: 12-20Jul (Sat/ Sun)(Naadam avl)
GKM04: 20-28Jul (Sun/ Mon)
GKM05: 06-14Aug (Wed / Thu)
GKM06: 14-22Aug (Thu/ Fri)
GKM07: 25Aug-02Sep (Mon / Tue)
GKM08: 02-10Sep (Tue / Wed)

This trip may go in reverse direction due to logistics reasons.

