



Blue Dot Travel





\$12,990 pp

Twin-share, excluding
international airfares

Solo supplement \$1,400

MONGOLIA IN DEPTH WITH NAADAM FESTIVAL

A trip through the Land of the Sapphire Blue Sky is a truly unique experience.

If you're looking for a five-star type, cushy, comfortable holiday, then Mongolia is probably not for you. Mongolia is a land of extremes. If you want to get off the beaten track, Mongolia is unmatched in its wild beauty and rawness. In three weeks, you will get a wonderful taste of what this country has to offer. What you will experience, hear, taste and see, will engage all of your senses.

Mongolia is one of the world's least developed and least populated countries. With a population of only 3.3 million, roughly half of the country's population is packed into the capital, Ulaanbaatar. Outside of that, the population of Mongolia's largest "cities" remains in the tens of thousands, with a significant number still living a traditional lifestyle as nomadic herders.

Horses and horse culture play a large role in daily and national life in Mongolia. It is traditionally said that "A Mongol without a horse is like a bird without the wings." Mongolia has a horse population of more than 3.5 million, which exceeds the country's human population. On the road, it can take hours of driving before you pass a tiny ger community, a Mongolian on horseback, or even another vehicle. Yet in between, you are blessed with views of a countryside so dramatic that it will be indelibly imprinted on your memory.

From the stark Gobi, incredible rock formations and magnificence of Khogoryn Els in the south, to the crystal blue lakes and rushing clear rivers of the north, Mongolia will delight you with its fascinating culture and stunning beauty.



Monday 5 July DEPART AUSTRALIA

Depart for Seoul, where we will have an overnight stay (included in your international flight package).

Day 1, Tuesday 6 July ARRIVE ULAANBAATAR

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar from Seoul. After clearing immigration, we'll be transferred to our centrally located hotel for a two-night stay. We'll enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant. Accommodation is at Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel (or similar) for two nights. *D*



Day 2, Wednesday 7 July ULAANBAATAR CITY TOUR

Our city tour starts at Sukhbaatar Square, the central square named after the revolutionary hero of

1921 Damdiny Sukhbaatar who declared independence from China. We'll visit the Gandan Monastery, the centre of Buddhism in Mongolia and home to the Golden Buddha Statue of Migjid Janraisig. It's a beautiful sight to experience monks at worship or going about their daily lives amongst the grounds of this important religious site. After lunch, we'll visit the National Museum, famous for its wonderful collection of elaborate costumes, hats and

jewellery from the main Mongolian ethnic groups. The Museum also houses an exhibit dedicated to the Mongol empire, giving insight into the country's long nomadic tradition. *B/L/D*



Day 3, Thursday 8 July MONGOL NOMADIC SHOW AND HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

Today, we will drive approximately 55 km west of the capital towards the Mongol nomadic camp, where we will attend a Mongol nomadic show. The show provides information about traditional dairy products, felt-making processes, the nomads' migration from one pasture to another, and traditional games and musical instruments. After having lunch at the camp, we'll continue our drive, about another 50km drive to Hustai National Park.



There was a time when it would have been nearly impossible to see a Przewalski's horse (named after Russian geographer and explorer Nikolay Przhevalsky). They became extinct in the wild in the 1960s due to overhunting and harsh winters. Only two captive groups remained in the world – in zoos in Munich and Prague. In 1992, some of these horses were reintroduced into the wild at Mongolia's Hustai National Park, and the herd has been carefully monitored since. Now, more than 350 people live

here. Tonight is our first night in a traditional ger at Mongol Nomadic ger camp. Whilst the accommodation is basic, this is a unique opportunity to experience life as the Mongolian nomads do. Overnight at Mongol Nomadic ger camp (or similar), standard gers. **B/L/D**

Note. Staying in a traditional ger camp is a must-do cultural experience in Mongolia. It's a drawcard for many travellers. A traditional ger is a round, wooden-framed tent covered with wool felt and waterproof tarpaulin. The ger camps we use vary in size, with some common features: Each ger will accommodate a couple or two solo travellers, with permanent beds and a western-style mattress. You'll notice that we refer to some camps as "deluxe". The gers in these camps feature an ensuite toilet and shower, whilst the "standard gers" have shared facilities. Electricity is available at all camps, though some use a generator due to unreliable power supplies. Overall, you'll find the accommodation simple but comfortable, with a definite cultural charm. A much larger ger is used for communal dining, and at most camps, there is an additional ger with lounge and bar facilities.

Day 4, Friday 9 July CHINGGHIS KHAN STATUE & TERELJ NP

Today, we'll drive to the northeast, passing UB city, to see the massive 40 m-tall Genghis Khan Equestrian statue. Then we'll visit Terelj National Park, a unique area located near the big city, featuring granite rock formations such as Turtle Rock. We'll stay overnight at Terelj Lodge Ger Camp (or similar), deluxe gers. **B/L/D**

Day 5, Saturday 10 July KHOVSGOL LAKE

After breakfast at the camp, we'll drive to the airport and fly to Murun, the centre of the Khovsgol province, where our drivers will meet us. (Flight 09:25 – 10:35). On the way to Khuvsgul Lake, about 16 km from the airport, we'll visit the Uushgiin Chuluu deer stone site, which consists of 14 Bronze Age deersones erected in memory of the chiefly figures. Especially interesting is the 2.6m high Deerstone 14, one of the few found in Mongolia and the Russian Altai, it was engraved with many of the traditional themes, including stylised deer, a belt with hanging weapons sets such as a war hammer and dagger, and a striped pentagonal shape believed to be a shield. Then we'll drive 130 km, and we'll arrive for lunch at the stunning Lake Khovsgol. With an area of 2,620 square km and a depth of more than 244m, Lake Khovsgol is Mongolia's largest freshwater lake. The remainder of the day is spent at leisure, soaking in your surroundings. This is a remote area of extraordinary, pristine beauty. Overnight in Ashihai resort for two nights, deluxe rooms. **B/L/D**



Day 6, Sunday 11 July NAADAM FESTIVAL

Today we will witness the spectacular Naadam Festival, featuring the three key Mongolian traditional sports of wrestling,

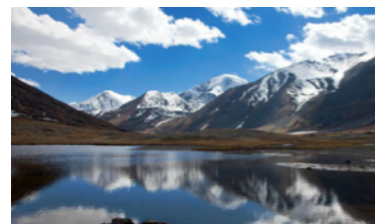
archery, and horse racing. The opening ceremony of our rural Naadam festival occurs at Khatgal village. A rural Naadam offers a chance to get much closer to the action and provides a more intimate experience with the local

people. Naadam festival celebrates the victory of the People's Revolution leading to Mongolia's independence and its rich cultural heritage. The distinctly Mongolian feel and flair of the Naadam Festival make it a wonderful spectacle, a joyous time, and an intriguing cultural event. Colourful ceremonies and parading soldiers kick off the celebrations. The ancient game of wrestling follows, with men competing in many rounds of competition. Both men and women compete in the archery games, using the traditional Mongolian compound bow that terrorised Europe when Genghis Khan and his Golden Horde moved their empire west. The quintessentially Mongolian art of horse racing follows. While these are traditionally male-dominated sports, women and children also compete **B/L/D**



Day 7, Monday 12 July KHOVSGOL LAKE TO ZUUN LAKE

This day, we'll start driving to the northern part of the lake to explore its shores, do a light walk along the shorelines, visit a local souvenir market, watch yaks grazing and visit a yak breeding family. After lunch at the resort, we'll continue our day drive – about 200 km of bumpy road - towards salt Lake Zuun or Eastern Lake, located between prominent destinations, Khuvsgul Lake and Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake. We'll overnight at Ulzii Khishigt Ger Camp (or similar). Standard gers. **B/L/D**



Day 8, Tuesday 13 July ZUUN LAKE TO TERKHIIN TSAGAAN LAKE

Today, we travel to Terkhiin Tsagaan National Park and Khorgo Volcano – approximately 170 kilometres. The lake, birdlife and mountains are now protected within the 77,267-hectare Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur National Park. The lake, formed by lava flows from a volcanic eruption many millennia ago, is excellent for swimming, although it can be a bit cold in the morning. Try swimming in the late afternoon, after the sun has warmed it. Hike to the Khorgo volcano crater in the afternoon. Overnight in Maikhan tolgoi ger camp. Standard gers. **B/L/D**



Day 9, Wednesday 14 July TO KARAKORUM VIA ARHANGAI PROVINCE

In the morning, we'll drive towards the 13th-century capital city of Karakorum. We'll stop at the central town of Arkhangai province to visit Zayiin Gegeen monastery museum built at the foot of Bulgan mountain in mid 1600s. After seeing the museum, we'll have our lunch at Fairfield cafe run by an Aussie family who have introduced coffee culture in the Mongolian countryside and support the local community. We'll get Karakorum, the capital city of the Great Mongol Empire, in about a two-hour drive on mostly paved roads. Overnight at ASA land resort (or similar) for three nights, deluxe gers or villas. **B/L/D**





Day 10, Thursday 15 July TO KARAKORUM

We'll start our day by visiting the Karakorum Museum. Karakorum was the ancient capital of Mongolia, situated on the right bank of the Orkhon River and on the northeastern slopes of the Khangai Mountains. The nomadic city was founded by Chinggis Khan in 1220, and it was not only the capital of the vast Mongolian Empire but the economic, cultural and trade centre. After lunch at our camp, we'll continue exploring Karakorum and visit Erdene Zuu monastery, built by Avtai Sain Khan on the ruins of the



Mongolian capital Karakorum in 1586. It was the first great Buddhist monastery in Mongolia and part of the World Heritage Site entitled Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape. Stones from the ruins of Karakorum were used

in its construction. It is surrounded by a wall featuring 108 stupas, 108 being a sacred number in Buddhism, and the number of beads in a Buddhist rosary. The Erdene Zuu Monastery was placed under state protection and converted into a museum in 1944. The political climate in Mongolia is shifting, and Buddhism, previously suppressed, is experiencing resurgence throughout the country. **B/L/D**



Day 11, Friday 16 July KARAKORUM

We have a 45-minute drive to the Khushuu Tsaidam Museum, part of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape, with highlights including artifacts from the 6th-8th-century Turkic Empire. In the afternoon, enjoy your stay at the resort or take a walk to the hill overlooking the town to where a mosaic wall was erected to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Great Mongol Empire in 2006. The hill overlooks the Orkhon River valley and the modern Karakorum town. Stunning scenery! **B/L/D**



Day 12, Saturday 17 July TO THE GOBI VIA ONGI TEMPLE

Today we'll have a long drive (around 550 km on a bumpy road) to the Gobi Desert. We'll start our day with an early breakfast and by lunchtime, we'll arrive at the ruins of the Ongi monastery, the largest Buddhist centre in the Gobi region and the gate to the northernmost desert in the world, the Gobi desert. Two complexes of temple ruins were built in the 1780s. During the political repression of the late 1930s, these two temples were destroyed, and many lamas were executed and imprisoned. We will visit the monastery's ruins and the reconstructed parts. Overnight in the Ongiin nuuts ger camp, standard gers. **B/L/D**



Day 13, Sunday 18 July KHONGOR SAND DUNES

After breakfast, we'll drive to the famous Khongor dunes, the most important sand mass of the Gobi

Gurvan Saikhan National Park, covering an area of more than 900 square kilometres. It's one of the largest sandy areas of Mongolia. Suddenly standing out from the plains, they are undoubtedly among the most spectacular of the country. The wind continuously blows from north towards west and the dunes can reach breathtaking heights, between 100 and 300 metres at their highest points. Khongor dunes are more than 180 km long and can reach 27 km wide. The inhabitants name their imposing dunes "singing dunes" due to the noise made by the wind when it moves the sand. Beyond the dunes, the steppe extends as far as the eye can see. Khongor dunes have a particular appeal because of their impressive colour combination (pale yellow). At the northern end, they are lined with a green, luxuriant vegetation band, delimited by the Khongor River, which flows from subterranean sources and runs along the dunes for a few kilometres, forming an oasis in the middle of the desert landscape. Sta at Gobi discovery ger camp, standard gers. **B/L/D**



Day 14, Monday 19 July GOBI MIRAGE CAMP

For those up to it, this morning there is an opportunity to have a 30-minute camel ride at the bottom of the dunes (it's good fun but not for everyone). Then, we drive back to the Gobi Mirage Camp. On the way, we'll stop at Khavtsgait hill.

Petroglyphs from the Bronze Age (4000-3000 BC) are beautifully carved on rocks on the top of a sacred



mountain. The rocky area can be slippery, but by carefully following a path up the mountain, you can reach the top to see these beautiful rock paintings. The petroglyphs were carved and painted with motifs depicting animals, hunting scenes, and weapons. They depict various animals related to the everyday life of ancient people. The climb takes 10-15 minutes, and walking sticks are recommended for those with mobility issues. In the late afternoon, we'll drive to the area named 'Flaming Cliffs' by Roy Chapman Andrews, an American explorer who searched throughout the Mongolian Gobi Desert and found dinosaur skeletons and eggs first ever seen in the world while the local name is Bayanzag or Rich in saxaul, tree typical for the sandy and stone deserts of Central Asia and the only kind of tree found in the Gobi. The red cliff gleams in the sunlight and can be seen from a great distance. We will take a short walk on pathways on the ridge of the cliff and enjoy the sunset over the Gobi Desert. Late dinner is expected. Overnight at Gobi Mirage Camp for 2 nights in deluxe gers. **B/L/D**



Day 15, Tuesday 20 July YOL VALLEY AND FLAMING CLIFFS

After breakfast, we'll drive to Yol Valley, which is also known as Bearded Vulture Valley. We'll learn about local wildlife in the Natural History Museum before gently hiking through the valley to discover their habitats. This valley, nestled deep within the hills, is a haven from the desert heat. Some areas of the valley are continually sheltered from the hot sun, and consequently, the stream freezes over in winter and remains partially frozen until late summer. It is vast at the entrance and narrows gradually into a remarkable

gorge. We will hike into the gorge, which is a 2.5-hour round-trip, and along the way, we might see ibex, mountain goats, Altai pica, yaks, and vultures. In the afternoon, you can enjoy your stay in your lovely ger or have coffee and drinks in the lounge area. **B/L/D**

Day 16, Wednesday 21 July FLIGHT TO ULAANBAATAR

After breakfast, we'll drive an hour to the local airport for our one-hour flight to Ulaanbaatar city. At the airport, we'll say goodbye to our drivers. Upon arrival, we'll visit the Bogd Khan Winter Palace Museum, the home of the last Mongolian King, Javzun Damba Khutagt VII. The museum contains several Buddhist artworks and the private collection of Bogdo Khaan, a state and spiritual leader, composed of gifts from rulers and kings from all over the world. The artworks displayed here were created by top Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chinese master sculptors of the 18th and 19th centuries and depict deities of the Buddhist pantheon. In the evening, you'll be treated to a wonderful display of Mongolian throat singing, musicians, dancers and contortionists, followed by a farewell dinner. After dinner, consider having farewell drinks at the hotel's top-level bar to swap stories and say your goodbyes. We'll stay at Best Western Premier Tushin Hotel for our final night. **B/L/D**



Day 17, Thursday 22 July WESTERN MONGOLIA WITH EAGLE HUNTERS

Early in the morning, we'll be transferred to the airport for our flight

to Ulgii (1.5-hour duration 07:25 – 08:40). Raw, rugged, remote and backward, this region has for centuries been isolated – both geographically and culturally from central Mongolia. With its glacier-wrapped mountains, shimmering salt lakes, and hardy nomadic culture, as well as its traditions of falconry and horsemanship, western Mongolia is a timeless slice of Central Asia. On arrival at Ulgii, we'll drive 30 km to Saisai county to visit a local Kazakh eagle hunter's family, where we'll immerse ourselves in centuries-old, still surviving, unique eagle hunting culture practised by the Kazakh ethnic group. The Kazakhs are semi-nomadic people who have roamed western Mongolia's mountains and valleys with their herds since the 19th century. Falconry developed in Central Asia, and for centuries, Kazakh men have hunted from horseback with trained golden eagles, the largest and most powerful of raptors. Fox, rabbits and even wolves are hunted in winter for their fur across the snowy mountains and steppes. We'll spend time with a local eagle hunter's family, who would love to share their

centuries-long traditions and customs passed down from generation to generation, and, if you choose, hold a Golden eagle or a sneaker falcon. Learn about the traditional costumes worn by Kazakh men and the wonderful embroidery work of our hostess, who will prepare lunch for our group. Stay three nights at the Bayan Tsambaragav Hotel. **B/L/D**



Day 18, Friday 23 July WESTERN MONGOLIA – KHORGU LAKE

Today, we'll enjoy a short hike and the breathtaking scenery of the snowcapped Altai Mountains at Tolbo Lake, located 50km from Ulgii, where White Russians were surrounded by the Bolsheviks and their Mongolian allies in 1921. In the afternoon, we will drive to Friendship Hill to marvel at the vast landscapes of the Altai Mountains and the turbulent waters of the Khovd River.

B/L/D



Day 19, Saturday 24 July ULGII, WESTERN MONGOLIA BACK TO ULAANBAATAR

After breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport and fly back to the capital, arriving around midday (tbc).

The afternoon is free to choose what you would like to do. Visit the Gobi cashmere or State Department store, revisit the National Museum, walk around the city centre, enjoy the

local atmosphere, or relax in a coffee shop and catch up with WiFi. In the evening, you'll be treated to a wonderful display of Mongolian throat singing, musicians, dancers and contortionists, followed by a farewell dinner. Stay at The Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel for your final night.

B/L/D



Day 20, Sunday 25 July DEPARTURE

We depart the capital today for our flight home. Flight schedule to be advised. **B**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.