

## Mongolia Explorer: 16 Days

### Modified July 10 itinerary

Here are the key changes:

1. You will celebrate Naadam in Ulaanbaatar, not in the countryside
2. You will take a slightly different route through the countryside on Days 6-8 to account for the above change
3. You will attend a Yak Festival on Day 13

### A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME MONGOLIA ADVENTURE

#### A TRIP FOR ADVENTUROUS WOMEN

This is Mongolia, the way it SHOULD be done. **Experience the magic that is the Mongolian way of life** on this in-depth cultural adventure, of what may be one of the last, truly nomadic cultures remaining in the modern world.

From the city of Ulaanbaatar to rural villages and everything in between, you'll see it all. Take in the athletic feats at the State **Naadam Festival**, discover how an NGO is working to combat desertification in the **Gobi Desert** and walk around **Bayanzag**, the paleontological site where the first dinosaur egg was discovered.

You'll also get a chance to **immerse yourself in Mongolia's cultural heritage**. During this trip, you'll eat a home-cooked meal with a nomadic host family, take a camel ride through the dunes and even try your hand at milking a yak.

Throughout the trip, **you'll find the accommodations simple, but comfortable**. Also, you can expect to spend a good bit of time on the road. After all, Mongolia is not a small country, and you don't want to miss anything!

Sound like an intriguing journey? Join up with a small group of female travellers who love adventure just as much as you do on this wow-worthy trip around Mongolia.



## **DAY ONE: ULAANBAATAR**

Your Mongolia adventure begins! A cheerful member of our team will greet you at Chinggis Khan International Airport for your transfer to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital.

Originally a nomadic city, Ulaanbaatar first became permanent around 400 years ago as a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. If you're arriving early enough, there may be time to squeeze in an old temple complex and monastery visit this morning.

This afternoon, take a stroll with the group across Sukhbaatar Square - a symbol of Mongolia's independence. A visit to the National History Museum is a fitting introduction to the land you're about to explore.

Next, you'll catch an up-close performance of folkloric song and dance by a traditional ensemble. Perhaps a bit touristy, but your first exposure to Mongolia's cultural heritage may actually quite surprise you!

Dinner is at our favourite restaurant. Tomorrow is a full day!!

**DRIVE TIME:** 45 mins

**ACCOMMODATION:** Hotel 9

**INCLUDED:** Dinner



## **DAY TWO: ULAANBAATAR - NAADAM FESTIVAL**

Let the games begin! Today you'll be a spectator at the celebrations of the State Naadam Festival in Ulaanbaatar. Nadam means "games" and every town and region across the country celebrates this festival of nomadic and Mongolian culture in July each summer.

The day begins with a parade in Sukhbaatar Square. You'll get a chance to appreciate the displays of athleticism along with speeches, costume shows, riding demonstrations, dancing and singing. And, it's only your second day in Mongolia!

The day doesn't stop there. Around midday, it's time to watch the horse racing at Khui Doloon Khudag. Have a traditional lunch of Huushuur, a type of meat pastry, from one of the cafes. Then, take in all the excitement from the grandstands.

It's an action-packed day. Evening in town is at your leisure. Recover from your first full day with an early bedtime or make your way over to the square to see the fireworks around 11 pm.

**DRIVE TIME:** 1hr/40km

**ACCOMMODATION:** Hotel 9

**INCLUDED:** Breakfast, lunch & dinner



### **DAY THREE: TERELJ NATIONAL PARK - COUNTRYSIDE KAYAK**

Terelj National Park is wonderful, but very popular. So, after visiting the iconic 'Turtle Rock', you'll get away from the crowds and over to your ger camp - a peaceful little spot by the Tuul River. (Ger is the Mongolian word for Yurt, and is pronounced like the word 'gear'.)

You're going to get out the inflatable kayaks this afternoon and reconnect with nature on a wide, shallow, beautiful river. Breathe in the air and relax: it's just you and the group, flowing water and the steppes. It's a gentle paddle and beginner friendly.

**DRIVE TIME:** 2.5hrs/74km

**ACCOMMODATION:** Standard Ger, Shuteen

**INCLUDED:** Breakfast, lunch & dinner



## **DAY FOUR: KHUSTAI NATIONAL PARK**

A hearty breakfast this morning before your face-to-face meeting with Chinggis Khan, to find out what he's been up to. Then, settle in for the drive to Khustai National park where you'll be welcomed by Sanjaa and his family, your hosts for this night.

Sanjaa is a park ranger tasked with protecting the local Takhi horses - the world's only truly wild horse breed. Share a chill moment with Sanjaa as dusk falls, watching these special horses gather nearby for a refreshing drink.

Dinner and fun times follow. The connection you'll make with Sanjaa's kind-hearted family more than makes up for the simple but clean homestay facilities.

**DRIVE TIME:** 3hrs/180km

**ACCOMMODATION:** Sanjaa's Family Ger

**INCLUDED:** Breakfast, lunch & dinner

### **Takhi Horses**

The Takhi horse became extinct in its native habitat of the steppe but was reintroduced to Mongolia from captive American stock in the 1990s, where to the amazement of scientists, it's making a comeback. Although, to this day it is still classed as 'endangered'.



## **DAY FIVE: MANDAGOBI - GOBI OASIS PROJECT**

A leisurely breakfast, then drive to meet Byamba Tseyin, who runs the Gobi Oasis tree planting nursery - an NGO that works to conserve the local environment and combat desertification (the Gobi is said to be the world's fastest expanding desert). Today, you'll plant some of the seedlings yourself, and contribute back to restoring Mother Nature. A small portion of your trip fee is contributed to this project.

Back at Byamba's home, it's time for a Mongolian cooking lesson. Together, you'll prepare a traditional nomadic dinner to enjoy!

**DRIVE TIME: 4hrs/240km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**

## **DAY SIX: THE FLAMING CLIFFS**

This morning, you're on the road again (if you can call it a road - it's often just a dirt track scratched out by 4WDs that have gone that way before you!) You'll stop at the impressive rock formations of Tsagaan Suvarga, where you can explore the area on foot for an hour or so, before heading to Bayanzag, in the depths of the Gobi.

Bayanzag is one of the most famous paleontological sites worldwide, known for the first discovery of a dinosaur egg and also many bones.

The flaming cliffs rise sharply out of the sandy earth... their deep red and ochre tones firing up even more at sunset.

Your home for the next two nights is a deluxe ger camp - yep; you'll even be able to have a shower!

**DRIVE TIME: 6hrs/400km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Deluxe Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**



## **DAY SEVEN: YOLYN AM - KHAVSGAIT PETROGLYPHS**

Yolyn Am is a beautiful local gorge, perfect for a leg-stretching 90-minute hike. We'll head over there in the morning. The wildlife is most active before the heat of the day arrives. Keep an eye out to spot vigilant birds of prey and ibex surveying the valley from rocky outcrops above.

In the afternoon, you're visiting the Khavsgait Petroglyphs (Bronze Age rock engravings) depicting life thousands of years ago. Walk amongst the rocks and discover the drawings for yourself. Take a moment to pause and let your mind wander back to those ancient times - can you actually believe you're one of the privileged few to witness this?

**DRIVE TIME: 1.5hrs/70km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Deluxe Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**

## **DAY EIGHT: CAMELS & DUNES - DUNGENE PASS - KHONGORYN ELS**

It's a driving day today as you head towards the sand dunes of Khongoryn Els. Along the way have your camera ready, because you never know when the next Mongolian horseman might ride on by!

If time permits (and it likely will), you'll take a short drive to the Singing Dunes and meet a camel herding family. Enjoy the family's hospitality in their ger where you will get to try camel milk and other hand-produced Mongolian foods. You'll notice the camels have two humps! These are the native Mongolian (Bactrian) camels (the Arabian camels only have one hump).

Afterwards, saddle up for a camel ride alongside the dunes. And be nice, as camels are known to spit (though, only if feeling threatened)! Around sunset, you'll hike up to the top to hear the haunting dune 'song', a phenomenon that's intrigued travellers since the times of Marco Polo.

**DRIVE TIME: 4hrs/180km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**



## **DAY NINE: ONGIIN KHIID**

Some more road-tripping today as we start the journey north towards the heartland of Mongolia. Driving is part of the fun when it comes to this vast country - and by now, your group's roomy 4WDs (they look more like combi vans) and the drivers in charge of them, are an intrinsic part of your Mongolian experience.

After the obligatory photographic pit stops and a picnic lunch en route, you'll settle into your ger camp beside the temple complex of Ongiin Khiid.

Feel free to go inside the tiny reconstructed temple, where you'll be able to see the monks who run the Monastery.

Like many nights, tonight you will be staying in a Ger camp. Because Mongolia has very few towns and cities, it also has very few hotels.

**DRIVE TIME: 7hrs/350km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Standard Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch, & dinner**

### **Ger Camps**

Ger camps have been built to recognise this need, and they cater for travellers. A typical ger camp has 20-40 gers, each containing 2 single beds. There are showers, toilets, and a food hall where visitors eat dinner each night. This is where the group will gather to eat and have a Mongolian vodka or two. Beer and wine are also typically available.





## **DAY TEN: URTIIN TOKHOI CANYON**

You'll continue north today. Open, flat plains give way to greener, undulating countryside, as you spot more farming families and their livestock. By this point in the trip, surrounded by this beautiful scenery, all cares in the world are forgotten as you totally disconnect from the routine of everyday life.

You will arrive at our camp by 3pm. If you feel like going horse riding or exploring the Urtiin Tokhoi Canyon in the Orkhon Valley, you have enough time to do that. Or maybe you'd love to unwind - get your hair washed in a 'spa' ger!

**INCLUDED: 6hrs/250km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Standard Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**

## **DAY ELEVEN: ORKHON VALLEY**

Continue up the Orkhon Valley (a World Heritage site) - the scenery is beautiful but the roads are rough! Although today's drive is only about 90 kilometres, it will take three hours.

Galaa is your local host for two nights near Orkhon Waterfall. After filling up on a home-cooked meal, you can either walk or ride to the falls.

During your stay with Galaa's family, you'll have the chance to set up a ger - with a little help from the locals, of course! In the evening, feast on more nomadic cooking. Simple, hearty, and delicious.

**DRIVE TIME: 3hrs/90km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Family Homestay Ger**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**



## **DAY TWELVE: GALAA'S FAMILY HOMESTAY**

Today is special as you experience the day-to-day life of a nomadic family. This is a yak-herding country, so you'll help milk the yaks and see how the milk is made into various foods, a staple to the Mongolian diet. Galaa's family will embrace you in every aspect of their activities!

You will also have time to explore and have some time out in the beautiful surroundings. You're free to head off on a horse ride. Try your hand at archery as well - another skill that the Mongols are accomplished at and part of their heritage as an ancient sport. The chance to experience a way of life that's stayed mostly the same for generations makes this into a day you won't forget quickly.

**DRIVE TIME: None**

**ACCOMMODATION: Family Homestay Ger**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**

## **DAY THIRTEEN: YAK FESTIVAL - UNDUR HYASAA**

Get ready for yet another one-of-a-kind experience - the Yak Festival is just a few kilometres away in a rural area known as Undur Hyasaa. Yaks have been valued for many years in the Mongolian countryside because the large creatures are integral to daily life.

Chances are this is your first time attending a festival celebrating yaks. Expect to witness yak rodeos, milking trials, beauty contests and even polo on yak back! Don't miss the chance to try your hand at yak milking and sample 'urum', a creamy, clotted cream made from the raw product.

**DRIVE TIME: Local Drives**

**ACCOMMODATION: Superior Ger**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**



#### **DAY FOURTEEN: TOVKHON KHIID**

This morning's activity is up to you: check out the felt festival or head out for a three-hour hike up to Tovkhon Monastery. The walk takes you to the hilltop temples through scenic, forested terrain to reveal a beautiful view.

Together, you'll all continue to Kharkhorin. On the way, you'll visit the monument of the Three Kings overlooking the Orkhon River, and the fertility stone on the edge of town. Warning: This may bring on a chuckle or two!

At the end of your hike, settle into your gers - complete with thoroughly-deserved hot showers!

**DRIVE TIME: 2hrs/70km to Tovkhon Khiid, 2.5hrs/70 km to Kharkhorin**

**ACCOMMODATION: Ger Camp**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**

#### **DAY FIFTEEN: ERDENE ZUU MONASTERY - ULAANBAATAR**

This morning, you'll get to Erdene Zuu Monastery in time to hear something very special - and you will feel honoured to have been a part of it. That's about all we can tell you; the rest is up to you to find out!

Back to Ulaanbaatar in the afternoon. Is the trip finished already? Almost, it seems.

It's time to say goodbye to the slow pace of the Mongolian countryside as your 4WD convoy heads back to the city; tarmac roads all the way! You'll have the chance to do some last-minute shopping - cashmere, anyone?

After settling in at the hotel, join your friends for a farewell meal at one of our favourite restaurants.

**DRIVE: 5hrs/320km**

**ACCOMMODATION: Hotel 9**

**INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch & dinner**



## **DAY SIXTEEN: ULAANBAATAR**

And that's it! Can you believe you've reached the end of your trip? There'll be hugs and tears as you say goodbye to your guide, drivers and your dear Patchie friends. The bonds you've all felt grow over the last two-and-a-half weeks are real, so don't be surprised if you find yourself wiping away a few tears.

You'll arrive at the airport with your head and heart filled with new memories. And, you're not likely to ever forget your Mongolia experience.

