

16-Day Mongolia Inc Naadam Festival

Day 1: ULAANBAATAR

Arrival in Ulaanbaatar. A friendly face will be waiting to meet you at the 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. The group will meet at the reception at 9am for 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, we drop into a small theatre for a performance of traditional music and dance by the Tumen Ekh Ensemble. Perhaps a bit touristy, but your first exposure to Mongolia's cultural heritage may actually quite surprise you!

Dinner is at our favourite local restaurant.

Accommodation: Hotel 9 (or similar)

Included: Dinner

Drive time: 45 minutes

Day 2: Nadaam 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 bed-time or make your way over to the square to see the fireworks around 11 pm.

Accommodation: Hotel 9 (or similar)

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 40 minutes

Mongolians and their Horses

Did you know that Mongolia has more horses than people? That's because Mongolian nomads take care of their horses by frequently switching between them, to avoid overwork.

They've been pivotal in Mongolian culture for centuries and still today, it's said that nomadic children know how to ride before they can walk. Horses are not only a means for travelling, herding stock, and providing milk, they're also a companion and a source of pride. Horse Festivals and Naadam are a Mongolian's way of expressing that pride – and on this trip, you'll be one of the few outsiders to witness this unique bond between horse and human.

Day 3: TERELJ NATIONAL PARK – COUNTRYSIDE KAYAK

Terelj National Park is wonderful, but very popular. After visiting the iconic 'Turtle Rock', you'll head over to your ger camp – a peaceful little spot nestled into the granite hills. (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.

Accommodation: Standard Ger, Shuteen

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 2.5hrs/74km



Day 4: 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.

Accommodation: Simple Private Ger, Sanjaa's Family

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 3hrs/180km

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 5: GOBI OASIS PROJECT

After a leisurely breakfast, drive to meet Byamba Tseyen's family, who runs the Gobi Oasis tree planting nursery, an NGO that works to conserve the local environment. Today, we'll plant some of the seedlings ourselves, and contribute back to Mother Nature. A small portion of your trip fee is contributed to this project.

Back at the family's home you will have a Mongolian cooking lesson. Together, we'll prepare a traditional nomadic dinner and then eat.

Accommodation: Ger Homestay, Gobi Oasis

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner



Drive time: 4hrs/240km

Day 6: THE FLAMING CLIFFS

This morning, we're on the road again. Mongolia is a country of wide open spaces, so this trip will involve quite a few days with extended time driving through the countryside.

Today, you're stopping at the impressive rock formations of Tsagaan Suvarga, where you can explore the area on foot for an hour or so before continuing on to Bayanzag, one of the most famous paleontological sites worldwide, known for dinosaur bone discoveries.

Walk around the spectacular sandstone formations, known as the Flaming Cliffs due to their deep red hue.

We'll stay the next two nights at a deluxe ger camp.

Accommodation: Deluxe Ger camp, Gobi Mirage

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 6hrs/400km

Day 7: KHAVSGAIT PETROGLYPHS

Yolyn Am is a beautiful local gorge and perfect for a leg-stretching 90 minute hike. We'll head over there in the morning.

In the afternoon, we're visiting the Khavsgait Petroglyphs (Bronze Age rock engravings) depicting life thousands of years ago. It's intriguingly pleasant to 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.

Accommodation: Deluxe Ger camp, Gobi Mirage

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 1.5hrs/70km



Day 8: CAMELS & DUNES

It's a driving day today as we head towards the Singing Dunes where you will visit a camel herding family.

Enjoy the hospitality in their ger where you will be able to try camel milk and other traditional Mongolian fare.

Afterwards, saddle up for a camel ride alongside the dunes. You're in the Gobi; let's make the most of it.

Around sunset we'll hike up to the top to hear the dune song, a phenomenon written about since the times of Marco Polo.

Accommodation: Ger camp, Juulchin Gobi

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 4hrs/180km

Day 9: ONGIIN KHIID

Today is a road trip day as we start the scenic journey north towards the heartland of Mongolia. Driving is part of the fun when it comes to this vast country. Most areas are still unpaved, so the driving can get a bit bumpy as the vehicle winds its way following tracks made by other vehicles.

After we enjoy the usual photographic and picnic stops en route, you'll settle into your Ger camp next to the temple complex of Ongiin Khiid.

Enter the tiny, reconstructed temple and 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.

Accommodation: Ger camp, Ongiin Nuuts

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 7hrs/350km

GER CAMPS

Ger camps have been built to cater to 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 enjoy a Mongolian vodka or two, with beer and wine also typically available.

Day 10: URTIIN TOKHOI CANYON

After breakfast we continue north. The open flat plains give way to greener undulating countryside, with more grazer families and livestock. By this point in the trip, surrounded by this beautiful scenery, all the cares in the world are forgotten as you totally disconnect.

We will arrive at our camp by 3pm. You can go for a wander through the Urtiin Tokhoi Canyon of the Orkhon Valley, visit the ancient burial mounds at Temeen Chuluu, or simply relax at camp.

Accommodation: Ger Camp, Talbuin

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Driving time: 6hrs/250km

Day 11: ORKHON VALLEY

We continue up the Orkhon valley today – the scenery is beautiful, but the roads are particularly rough! Although today's drive is only about 90km, it will take 3 hours to arrive.

Galaa is our local host for 2 nights near Orkhon Waterfall, where the group will enjoy another stay with a family of true nomads. As you settle into the rhythms of life of the Mongolian



countryside, the hustle and bustle of our modern world will feel a million miles away.

During your time with Galaa's family you will get a chance to erect a ger – with a little help from the experts, of course! In the evening, enjoy a nomadic feast. Simple, hearty and delicious.

Note: for these 2 nights, there is a portable shower only.

Accommodation: Family Homestay Ger, Galaa's Family

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 3hrs/90km

Day 12: GALAA'S FAMILY

Today is a special experience as you experience the day to day life of a nomadic family.

This is yak-herding country, so you can help milk the yaks and see how the milk is made into a variety of foods. Galaa's family will welcome you into every aspect of their activities!

You will also have time to explore and relax in the beautiful surroundings. including heading off on a horse ride if you like. Try your hand at archery as well. This is a day you won't forget quickly.

Accommodation: Family Homestay Ger, Galaa's Family

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: None

Day 13: 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.



Then settle into your gers, complete with thoroughly deserved hot showers! After two nights of nomadic hospitality, it's nice to enjoy a few Western comforts.

Accommodation: Superior Ger, Talbiun

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: Local drives

Day 14: TOVKHON KHIID

Say a reluctant goodbye to your nomadic hosts after breakfast for a 3 hour hike of intermediate difficulty up to and from Tovkhon Monastery. We'll walk up to the unique hilltop temples through the scenic forested countryside and catch a beautiful view. Those who want to sit out the hikes, of course can do so.

Afterwards continue to the historic area of Kharkhorin. There will be time to visit the Monument of the 3 Kings, overlooking the Orkhon River, and the fertility stone on the edge of town.

Accommodation: Standard Ger, Anja

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 2hrs/70km

Day 14: ERDENE ZUU

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.



Accommodation: Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar

Included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Drive time: 5hrs/320km

Day 15: ULAAN BAATAR

And that's it! There'll be hugs and tears aplenty as we say goodbye to our trip leader and driver. After two weeks, you'll have fallen in love with them.

You'll then be transferred to the airport with a head and heart full of new memories.

We can tell you from experience – Mongolia will stay with you for a long time.

Included: Breakfast

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