

July 9 – Depart USA

Roundtrip air is easy from US to Ulaanbaatar. See AFS Trip Tips to come via email

July 10 – Welcome to the capital on Mongolia!

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Arrive in Ulaanbaatar and go immediately to the Holiday Inn which is centrally located in the downtown area with most key sites within walking distance.

Late afternoon marks the beginning of the *Deeltei Mongol Festival* that features parade by people in traditional costumes. Last groups had a ball here dressing up in costumes with the locals. Expect to witness folk art concerts, circus performances, ankle-bone shooting as well as a contest of Mongolian national clothes. The entire Chinggis (Genghis) Khan Square will be filled with vendors and performers. There will be gers (what we call yurts) and tents or people displaying handcrafts and carvings and food.

In the evening we'll have a AFS Welcome Dinner and get to know your fellow travelers.

Overnight: [Holiday Inn Ulaanbaatar](#)

July 11 – Naadam Festival !

B/L/D

This morning we attend the Opening Ceremonies of the spectacular Naadam Festival. Soldiers on horseback, dressed in Chinggis Khan Warrior regalia enter the National Stadium followed by hundreds of adults and children dressed in traditional costumes representing Mongolia's different ethnic groups. The President of Mongolia will official mark the festival's beginning followed by the first challenge of wrestling. The entire grounds around the stadium are filled with people in traditional dress participating in different feats of competition from archery, to throat singing to eagle dancing.

Later, we visit the ornate **Bogd Khan Palace Museum**, the last remaining of the Mongolian emperor Bogd Khan (1869–1924). Considered the third most important person in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy-only after Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, his palace is filled with almost 9,000 treasured possessions. We will then continue to the hilltop **Zainsan Memorial** that honors allied Mongolian and Soviet soldiers killed in World War II. The panoramic view gives you a great perspective of Ulaanbaatar in the valley below, as well as the Tuul River flowing past the city.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Ulanbaatar

July 12 – Naadam and Horses

B/L/D

Following breakfast, we travel to **Khui Doloo** (20 miles) to the horse racing field. The field marks the finish line for a 10 to 20 mile crosscountry race by children and youths between 5 to 13 years old. The length of races depend on the child's age and in between the arrivals of the thundering horses and their jockeys you can mingle with the locals who come to cheer them on. We can wander through the nomadic tented camps and food stalls that spring up behind the race track and experience a gathering of entire nomadic Mongolia at one site!

Afterwards, we travel to **Hustai National Park** where we will first have lunch in a ger camp before exploring the park. Keep your eye open for the wild takhi – also known as Przewalskii's horses which have been reintroduced to the park after near extinction. We'll return to Ulaanbaatar in the evening. It's said this city is "sinfully fun" with so much to do. So much to do here from Foodie Tours, Ice Bar, pubs and clubs and more.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Ulaanbaatar

July 13 – Yol Valley and Gurvansaikhan National Park

B/L/D

In the morning, we take a short flight to South Gobi where local guides will meet us with 4WD vehicles. We will visit the local Natural History Museum for an insight into the flora and fauna of the area and proceed to and proceed to the Yol Valley in Gurvansaikhan National Park, situated in the lap of the Altai Mountains.

Nestled deep within the hills, the valley is a safe haven to get away from the desert heat and narrows into a beautiful gorge as it goes deeper into the hills. It is also a haven for wild animals such as ibex, yaks and wild sheep, and the vulture.

We'll have free time to either hike through the canyon or rent a horse with the lead. Horse ride! Our evening is spent glamping in the amazing Dream Gobi Ger camp where we have our deluxe gers, complete with their own bathroom facilities inside. Out here in this amazing remote area, you will witness the spectacular Blue Skies Mongolia is so famous for and witness an array of stars like you have never seen before.

Check into our Gers with full bathrooms! Wait 'til you see this place – top notch above other camps.

Overnight: Dream Gobi Ger Camp [link](#)

July 14 – Khongoryn Els

B/L/D

After breakfast, we enjoy a scenic drive to Khongoryn Els and our new ger camp, Gobi Erdene, stopping along the way to photo ops. After lunch, we hike or walk to the natural phenomenon known as the Duut Mankhan - the Singing Sand Dunes. The singing comes as the wind moves sand across these vast mounds. Khongoryn Els or Khongor Sand Dunes are some of the largest and most spectacular sand dunes in Mongolia. Reaching up to 984 feet high, they are over 7 miles wide and more than 62 miles long.

Later, we'll visit a nearby nomadic family for an authentic insight into the local life. Each summer, nomads arrive here in South Gobi with their livestock to take advantage of the green pasture close to the Khongoryn River. We'll visit their home and have the opportunity to ride their camels to explore the area! The families may offer sour cheese and yak milktea to try if you would like.

Overnight: Dream Gobi Ger Camp

July 15 – Bayanzag

B/L/D

After breakfast, we will leave for Bayanzag and the stunningly beautiful **Flaming Cliffs**. The place was named by the American explorer Roy Chapman Andrews who came to the Mongolian Gobi

Desert in the early 1900s and found Asia's first dinosaur skeleton and eggs. The red cliff gleams with sunlight and can be seen from miles away. We'll explore the ridge of the cliff on our own and perhaps look for the pieces of Dinosaur bones.

Flight back to Ulaanbaatar

Overnight: Blue Sky Tower Ulaanbaatar [link](#)

July 16 – Ulaanbaatar

B/L/D

After an early morning breakfast, we will fly back to Ulaanbaatar and head to the Chinggis Khan Statue complex for great photo opps and awesome selfies. This massive statue of Chinggis Khan on horseback towers 131 feet tall. You are able to enter the statue from the chest of the horse and climb up to the head of the horse where you will enjoy the panoramic view of the vastplains.

Return to Ulaanbaatar city late afternoon and you have free time for shopping. This area is known for its fine cashmere products, camel hair products, leather and local crafts. Consider a Foodie Dumpling Tour, visit to Lama Temple, Winter Palace or visit the National Mongolia and Dinosaur Museums. In the evening we toast each other farewell at our final group dinner.

Overnight: Blue Sky Tower Ulaanbaatar

July 17 – Back to USA

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After breakfast, we check out of the hotel and transfer to the airport to head back home

Air: There are only a handful of airlines that fly to Ulaanbaatar and they will not book group reservations during the festal. See trip tips for more.

INCLUDES

- 5-nights hotel accommodation (First three nights Holiday Inn and last two nights Blue Sky Tower) and 2-nights in a deluxe ger in Dream Gobi Lodge (Total 7 nights)
- All transfers and sightseeing by private vehicle (4WD Minivans in South Gobi-4 persons per van)
- Three meals a day (Set menu). (First-day dinner only, three meals a day from day 2-6, breakfast and dinner on day 7 and breakfast only on day 8)
- English speaking local certified guide
- Sightseeing admission tickets
- Drinking water (1.5 liters per day)
- Internal Air Ulaanbaatar-South Gobi-Ulaanbaatar
- Nadam Festival admission ticket.

NOT INCLUDED - Gratuities (added to invoice), optional camel or horse rides (around \$10)

From Lonely Planet –

Welcome to Mongolia

Rugged Mongolia is an adventure destination where travellers can experience nomadic culture and vast, untouched landscapes.

An Open Country



Mongolia

existed in a Soviet bubble for most of the 20th century. Now a generation beyond the fall of communism, Mongolia has emerged as a young democracy with a promising economy based on mining, agriculture and tourism. Some revenue is being funneled back into improving tourist facilities, including a new international airport near Ulaanbaatar. Visas are relatively easy to acquire; a handful of nationalities won't even require one. Competition among the tour operators has led to better services. Despite the warm welcome, travel can be rough at times, with only basic facilities in many areas.

Mongolian Wilderness

Mongolians are fully aware of the unique beauty of their country. Ask locals and they will probably start gushing about the spectacular countryside, vast steppes, rugged mountains, clear lakes and abundant wildlife and livestock. Some areas are so remote you could drive a full day and see almost no signs of human habitation. It's this true wilderness experience that many people find so appealing. City residents from Ulaanbaatar have also started to discover their own country and camping is now popular among urban locals. Protected areas cover almost a fifth of the country and the government is looking to increase that figure.

Nomad Hospitality

Mongolia's nomadic culture is famous – visitors can sleep in a herder's ger (traditional felt yurt), help round up the sheep, ride horses and simply 'get back to nature'. The legacy of Chinggis Khan and resurgent nationalist pride sharpens the experience. A culture of tremendous hospitality makes locals more accessible. In a world beset by locks and gates, it's refreshing to meet people willing to open their doors to strangers. When travelling in Mongolia, however, keep in mind that guests are expected to reciprocate any forms of generosity, so when visiting families, always have a ready supply of gifts for the kids.

Not Just Grass & Horses

Once half nomadic, Mongolia is changing rapidly as its citizens flock to Ulaanbaatar and other big cities for work and study opportunities. The capital in particular is changing at a dizzying pace and many Mongolians have bought wholeheartedly into the global economy, capitalism and consumerism. Whether they are rural or urban, Mongolians take pride in their country's democratic institutions of civic participation. Mongolia is eager to be part of the global community, sending its troops on peacekeeping missions around the globe and promoting itself as a country to host northeast Asian peace talks; visiting now puts you in the middle of these dramatic transformations.

Welcome to The Gobi

The Gobi reveals itself in pockets of amazing scenery, bridged by vast stretches of desolation where smartphone signals die and silence saturates. It can be daunting to be this far out in such harsh conditions, but this is where desert foliage shimmers in greens and golds, and where Tibetan lamas etched ancient messages on red rock cliffs. You'll watch horses romp and gazelles sprint, hear goats and sheep cry, and commiserate with camels huddling in fierce winds that gather and roll across the steppe. At night galaxies erupt on the domed sky.

No wonder it's one of Mongolia's top-draw regions, promising colossal sand dunes, ice-filled canyons, dinosaur fossils, camel treks, and hospitable nomadic herders who will shower you with warmth, and more than a little milky tea. So choose one of those criss-crossed two-wheel tracks and follow it ever deeper into the mystery.

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