



BEYOND THE STEPPE TOUR - MONGOLIA

TOUR OVERVIEW

July 2900 USD
12 Night tour in Mongolia

SUMMARY

This amazing tour has been planned and put together to offer visitors the chance to see more of Mongolia, incorporating many of its highlights and traditional hospitality.

We will meet together in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar before we fly out to Mongolia's far Western reaches. We will start exploring this region from the city of Hovd, where we will visit our first nomadic family for a truly local experience. Here we will also meet a true Shaman, as well as listen to some local throat singing. We will sleep in traditional Mongolian Gers (yurts), and camp with local nomads next to beautiful lakes, mountains, and rivers. As the tour continues we will drive into the Kazakh area of Mongolia, known as Bayan Ulgii. This mountainous region is stunningly beautiful pitted with lush green valley's all the while being surrounded by snow-capped mountains. We will make our way through this area visiting the Tavan Bogd National Park. This is one of Mongolia's National Parks that borders China and Russia, and is home to the Friendship Peak and an amazing glacier. After our visit to the base of this glacier we will head back to the regional capital of Ulgii to catch the local Naadam festival.

Naadam festival is the most important holiday and festival in Mongolia. The origins of the festival date back to past the time of Chinggis Khan in the 13th century. As it was originally a way of training horses and preparing men for battle, the festival revolves around the three 'manly' sports of wrestling, archery and horse racing. In some ways Nadaam is more a festival today than it was in the past, as it is a great opportunity for the young to meet, chat, and possibly meet a future partner. For those not so interested in the three main games, Nadaam is therefore also a great time for people watching, as well as for viewing the various stalls with their various wares that are on sale around the festival's fringes.

SAFETY

At Koryo Tours our main priority (besides tour enjoyment) is your and the group's safety. Since 2012 we have worked with a local travel agency who help us ensure that the journey is safe in terms of vehicles we use and the areas we visit. You are entering the country as a legal tourist, and therefore must obey the local laws and customs. One of our experienced Koryo Tours guides will accompany the trip.

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WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

Many passengers visit Mongolia every year, many only scratch the surface stopping whilst on the Trans Siberian train journey for 3 or 4 days. We at Koryo will help broaden this experience by taking you further, and off the central tourist route, to gain a better experience and understanding of this truly unique country. With visits to Mongolians, Kazakh Eagle hunters, Shamans, Tuvan's, the Naadam festival, and glaciers, you will not be disappointed.

DAILY ITINERARY

JULY 1ST - SUNDAY (DAY 1)

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar

Upon landing all group members will be met and taken to our hotel in Mongolia's capital. If you're feeling energetic, you can take our optional walking tour to get your first taste of this fascinating city, before returning to the hotel for our 6 pm briefing.

Here we'll give you an overview of the country and its culture, along with some etiquette tips for visiting the homes of the shamans, Kazakhs, and Tuvan people we'll meet along the way. Then join us for another city walk, this time by night. Get a glimpse of Sükhbaatar Square, named for revolutionary hero Damdinii Sükhbaatar. The statues of Genghis Khan and other Mongolian generals are even more impressive when all lit up.

Meals: dinner

Overnight:

Hotel 9: A local hotel situated in the heart of Ulaanbaatar, within 5 minutes walk from the main square. This hotel offers a great location from which to walk out and explore the city.

JULY 2ND – MONDAY (DAY 2)

Tour of the city, and then fly to Hovd Province

AM

- This morning we have an early departure taking a two-hour flight to Hovd province, where we will pile into Russian jeeps to visit a local Uriankhai shaman and his family. Here we can witness some of the ancient and mysterious rituals the community still holds dear, such as mirrors that repel evil spirits, and the use sacred fire and water. We will also have time with the local family who are hosting us in their traditional Mongolia Ger.

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PM

- This afternoon we visit the small city of Hovd and check out the local market, formerly the Soviet-era black market, where you can buy traditional fabrics, textiles, Mongolian buttons, and other souvenirs — all sold out of shipping containers. There are few Westerners in this area, so be prepared for curious locals. We'll also visit a small local shop to pick up a few drinks and supplies for this evening.
- After our dinner at the Ger camp, we will be entertained by a traditional Mongolian singer whom will show us the incredible art of Mongolian throat singing. There will be the chance to meet him after and take photos.

Meals: breakfast, Lunch, dinner.

Overnight:

Tourist Ger camp: One of only 2 camps found around the city of Hovd. This camp has amazing views over the surrounding countryside whilst being situated on the outskirts of the main city. It has a separate shower block and facility for our chief to prepare breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (Single Gers may not be available.)

JULY 3RD – TUESDAY (DAY 3)

Drive to Tolbo Lake

AM

- After a hearty breakfast, we'll stop by Hovd for a morning visit of the local Buddhist monastery; this is a true local monastery where we will see its function within the lives of everyday local people. We will then take our first long drive on towards Tolbo Lake, stopping for photos of scenery along the way and lunch.

PM

- We should arrive at Tolbo Lake around mid afternoon. With an altitude of 2,080 meters, Tolbo Lake is not only famous for its remote beauty, but also for being the site of a crucial 1921 battle between the Bolshevik and White Russian forces – locals still find belt buckles and buttons in the field. We will stop for photographs along the way, as nomads lead their herds across the vast lands, or make their way to the Naadam festival. We'll spend the night in a lakeside tourist camp where you can swim or bathe in the clear waters, or just unwind and take in the mountain views.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Tourist Ger camp: This amazing camp is situated on the shores of Tolbo lake. Those who wish can swim in the chilly waters of the lake or enjoy a drink watching the sun set over its crystal waters. There are also some great walks to be had in the surrounding hills. It has a



separate shower block and facility for our chief to prepare breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (Single Gers may not be available.)

JULY 4TH – WEDNESDAY (DAY 4)

Khar Us (Little Black Lake) and Khar Nuur (Black Lake)

AM

- After breakfast, we set out onto the road as we head towards Sagasi village, near Khar Us Lake and the magnificent Altai Mountains. Bayan-Olgii (or Ulgii) province, known locally as the 'Roof of Mongolia', is a remote land of glaciers and mountain peaks; travellers can go for days without seeing a soul. This area is home to the Kazakh people, practicing Muslims and Mongolia's largest ethnic minority; here we'll learn about how nomadic life in the mountains differs from life in the steppes. The drive sees us pass Bayan Ulgii city where we will stop for supplies our last urban stop for the next few days.

PM

- After lunch we will drive into the mountains. This beautiful route offers stops to see the mud brick winter houses that Kazakhs use when the temperature drops below minus -30, when even their felt-lined Gers can't keep out the cold. We'll also see families keeping eagles – though this might not be what you think! Up here, food is scarce, and the locals need a little help finding food. Therefore most families keep golden eagles to help them hunt for rabbit, hare, and even small deer. They're happy to show us how it's done in a small demonstration. Tonight we stay with some of our close Kazakh friends, pitching our tents next to their family Gers so that we can learn more about life here.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/Tent: All camping equipment will be provided, tents, roll mats and sleeping bags (upon request.) We will build tents as a group with the assistance of our local team. All tents are on a two persons bases but single options are available upon booking. Camping next to local family on this night.

JULY 5TH – THURSDAY (DAY 5)

Khurgan and Khoton Lakes

AM

- Today's journey takes us through wild lands, over moraines (glacial debris), and past ancient burial sites, with stone-age rock carvings of animals and hunting scenes

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covering the mountainside. The spectacular Khurgan and Khoton Lakes lie at an altitude of 2,073 meters, and are surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

PM

- We set up camp on the shores of Khoton Lake, and spend the afternoon relaxing, exploring, or swimming in crystalline waters. After dinner, we meet the local Kazakh people and see the comparative affluence (by Mongolian standards) of lakeside Kazakhs, with their multiple Ger's and fertile land. The local family will also allow us a closer look at how they keep their golden eagles.
- In the evening we will gather some wood and warm ourselves by a blazing fire.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/ Tent: Camping next to local family on this night.

JULY 6TH – FRIDAY (DAY 6)

Khoton Lake

Today is a day of leisure, in order to experience a little more of local life here, or to relax after our long journey to this beautiful yet secluded part of the world.

AM

- If you wish, you can wake up early and may help our host family to round the herd and do the milking. After breakfast you have a chance to enjoy independent hiking in the surrounding hills or to go for a dip in the invigorating mountain river, one of its streams, or at the lakes edge.

PM

- For those who wish, this afternoon we will horse ride into the hills surrounding the lake. This 3-hour return trek will take us past some Ger encampments and through woodland up to Mongolia's largest waterfall. The waterfall itself is beautifully framed against the mountains.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/ Tent: Camping next to local family on this night.

JULY 7TH - SATURDAY (DAY 7)

Tsagaan Gol and Shiveet Khairkhan Mountain

AM

- Today, after breakfast, we will work our way through the mountains to reach the mouth of Tsagaan Gol (White River). This mighty water source has enough limestone deposits to give the milky river its name. As we set off saying goodbye to our lovely family, we retrace some of our journey before breaking off into the wilderness again. We will drive across high mountain passes, and past ancient burial sites and ancient Turkic standing stones, which date back to 2000BC. Eventually we will follow a glacial valley along the river, Tsagaan Gol, to reach today's destination.

PM

- This afternoon, we'll stop for pictures at the stunning Shiveet Khairkhan, a mountain with rock carvings and an unforgettable view of Tavan Bogd (Five Saints), a mountain massif on the border of Mongolia, China and Russia. To the indigenous minority Tuvan, Shiveet is sacred – as are the 400 mountain ibex, which are never hunted. The Tuvan are herders, and known for their archery skills. Each year the Tuvan climb Shiveet's summit and perform shamanistic rituals, to make offerings to the local ghosts and pay ancestral respects.
- Today, after days of having the locals watch us pitch our tents – and comment on how long it takes us, how thin the material is, and how we'll never survive the night – we'll build our own felt-lined Ger (with a little help), to learn how the nomads do it.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/ Tent: Camping on this night will be based around a pre-booked Ger, offering us the chance to prepare meals and equipment ready for tomorrow's hike. The scenery here is amazing – we'll be surrounded by snow-capped mountains and able to listen to the roar of the white river.

JULY 8TH – SUNDAY (DAY 8)

Hike to base camp of Altai Tavan Bogd

AM

- Today we leave our vehicles and heaviest luggage behind, load everything else onto camels, and then trek up Tavan Bogd with a local Tuvan guide. For those who do not wish to hike, you will be able to rent a horse for the journey.
- It's about 15 kilometres to our base camp, which is located at the edge of Potanin Glacier, the longest glacier in Mongolia. If you listen carefully, you might be able to hear it cracking! Potanin is at the foot of Malchin Peak, one of Tavan Bogd's five



sacred mountains. This hike will take us through lush alpine tundra, and past herds of camels, providing fantastic views across the glacier to the peaks.

PM

- Once we have made camp and enjoyed a warming cup of tea, we can then go and explore the Glacier. We will set off over the glacial drift to look down upon this frozen wonder. For those with even more energy there are some amazing hikes to be had before dinner.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/Tent: Tonight we camp in a designated site at the Tavan Bogd base camp. We will build a restaurant tent for dinner and for breakfast; toilet facilities are provided. The area we stay in is remote yet beautiful, as it is at the base of the main mountain range and only a stones throw from the main glacier.

JULY 9TH – MONDAY (DAY 9)

Return trek to Tsagaan Gol (White River)

Today we follow the camel's back down to our camp in Tsagaan Gol. Passing through Tavan Bogd's numerous valleys, we can see how the melting glacier transforms into the roaring White River. Upon arrival, we celebrate our adventure with a traditional feast – a reward for all our hard trekking work. Here we'll try a Kazakh delicacy called *beshbarmak*, or "five fingers", a delicious assortment of stewed meat, vegetables, and flour we eat with our hands.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Camping/Tent: Tonight we pitch tents with another local family located near to the town of Tsengle in a low river valley. We look at life here and experience yet another regional variation in hospitality.

JULY 10TH - TUESDAY

Drive through Bayan Olgii

Today we bid farewell to our Tuvan friends and take a relaxing drive back to Olgii, where we'll spend the night in a Kazakh tourist camp, stopping for pictures and greeting nomad families along the way. We may also catch a local festival nestled in this mountainous region.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

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Tourist Ger camp: We stay in one of the tourist Ger areas found on the outskirts of Ulgi city. This camp offers a shower block with warm running water and wash facilities as well as a restaurant area from where our chief can provide. (Single Gers will not be available.)

JULY 11TH - WEDNESDAY

Experience the Kazak Naadam

We end our adventure with one of the world's most fascinating festivals, an annual event that draws tribes from all over Mongolia to compete in traditional skills and feats of strength – especially wrestling, horseracing and archery. Here, families reconnect, share their news and favourite foods, have parties, and compete in games together. Naadam has become a world-famous tourist draw, but while Ulaanbaatar is filled with tour busses and day visitors, Bayan Olgii's event is still a local affair, virtually unchanged over generations.

Here we'll learn the secrets of Naadam, such as the unusual wrestling costume of undershorts and an open waistcoat. Legend has it that a woman in disguise once outwrestled all the men, and to prevent future humiliation, outfits were altered – these tops have no secrets. Also, if you see a sumo-sized wrestler defeated by a delicate youth, don't be surprised: the loser is probably from another area, and it's disrespectful to beat others at their own Naadam.

Tonight we sleep in Kazakh *Ger's* but you can enjoy cold beers and hot showers, easing you back into civilization.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Tourist Ger camp: We stay in one of the tourist Ger areas found on the outskirts of Ulgii city. This camp offers a shower block with warm running water and wash facilities as well as a restaurant area from where our chief can provide. (Single Gers will not be available.)

JULY 12TH – THURSDAY

Fly to Ulaanbaatar

Leaving our horses, camels, and Russian jeeps behind for good, we board a plane and return to Ulaanbaatar. We will arrive into UB around mid-day stopping at the Lama temple on the drive back into the city. As we move around the temple we will learn a little more about the religion in UB. The rest of the afternoon is a free for you to shop 'til you drop at the city market – you'll never find cheaper cashmere, and you might pick up a shamanistic or Buddhist artefact or a relic from Soviet times. History lovers can stop by the winter palace of the Bogd Khan (1869-1922), who became Khagan (theocratic ruler) when the country split from China in 1911. Or you can simply relax with a coffee or cocktail at an outdoor café and watch this fascinating city unfold before you. Then we'll meet up for dinner at a local family's home, so we can see Mongolian home life away from the steppes.

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Meals: breakfast, dinner in Mongolian BBQ grill.

Overnight:

Hotel 9: A local hotel situated in the heart of Ulaanbaatar, within 5 minutes walk from the main square. This hotel offers a great location from which to walk out and explore the city.

JULY 13TH - FRIDAY (DEPARTURE DAY)

Friday 13th July

Departure day

We end our adventure in the morning, with transfers to the airport for international flights. Pack your souvenirs, your dirty clothes, and your memories, and have a safe trip home!

For those who wish we now offer a tour extension to the Gobi desert. Please check with your tour manager for more details.

ACCOMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure from comfortable hotels in Ulaanbaatar to tourist Ger camps in Bayan Ulgii and camping whilst out in the countryside. *All accommodation is based on a shared option.

Single supplement is 55 USD per person: This will guarantee you a single room option in our hotel stay and camping. Whilst in the Ger camp you may still be sharing.

FOOD

Most meals are included in this tour although there is time allowed in Ulaanbaatar for your own exploration. Your tour guide will be able to advice on the options when you arrive. Whilst camping we will have a chef travel with us cooking a fusion of western and Mongolian dishes.

DIETRY REQUIREMENTS

Vegetarian food choices can be very limited once we leave Ulaanbaatar, although our chef may be able to take special dietary requirements into account on the tour. If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure that you let us know in advance.

In this region the availability of certain specialized products for restricted diets, e.g. gluten-free or dairy-free is minimal or non-existent. As such we would strongly recommend you bring these dietary items if you need them.

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TRANSPORT

All ground transport and domestic flights are included in this tour.

We use a mixture of vehicles: in Ulaanbaatar we will utilise larger private busses, and when we travel in the countryside Russian Built Vaz 4X4s are the vehicle of choice. Due to the nature of the adventure there will be long and sometimes bumpy drives. We will break these up where possible.

VISAS

Many nationalities still require a visa for a visit to Mongolia. Please do not hesitate to contact your tour manager to see if this is the case.

Mongolian VISA

The application process for a Mongolia visa is quite simple; you can apply for a visa yourself at your nearest Mongolian embassy. You will need to fill out an application form and submit one or two passport photos along with your passport. At times you may be required to provide proof of a tour booking with a Mongolian travel company. We can of course send this if required.

PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you are able to carry and lift your own luggage and walk with it for short distances.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack or wheeled luggage, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags or backpacks with wheels are convenient. A lockable bag or small padlock is useful as your luggage may get stowed separately and unattended while out and about.

ESSENTIALS

- Clothing: Daytime temperatures are warm and we recommend lightweight clothing plus some warm layers for the drop in night temperatures that are experienced in high desert areas and the mountains of Mongolia* You will also need a good waterproof jacket as at times the rain can be heavy.
- Day pack — for carrying essentials when exploring destinations like water, camera, snacks, jacket, etc.
- Sleeping bag: it can be cold at night especially when at altitude I would recommend a three season bag.
- Lightweight clothing/wind and waterproof jacket — a mixture of covering lightweight clothing and some warm layers are recommended. It is best to check the weather and seasonal information before travelling.



** Please note temperatures can get very low overnight in the Mountainous areas. If you get cold easily, make sure to bring extra layers of clothing or e.g. a thin fleece sleeping bag.*

- Comfortable shoes for full day walking/trekking — closed-in shoes will help to protect your feet from cuts and scratches when walking through cities as well as bush/grass-lands, and will also act as a barrier protection in rare cases against bites or stings.
- Sun protection (we'll be at some high altitudes!) — hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, and lip balm.
- One main piece of lockable baggage — ideally a soft hold all, kitbag or frameless rucksack. Keep luggage to a strict minimum as you will be expected to carry your bag throughout. Porters are not available in Mongolia. Please note that the luggage allowance for the domestic flights at the time of writing is 15kg per person for the hold plus 5kg hand luggage. It is possible to pay for small amounts of excess baggage at a cost of approximately \$2 per kilogram. Excess baggage can also be kept securely in Ulaanbaatar until our return to the city.

RECOMMENDED

- Personal medical kit — we recommend you carry items such as mild painkillers, electrolytes, Band-Aids and insect repellent.
- Water bottle — we recommend a 1.5-liter capacity for which we can provide potable water. Bottled water is also available but we prefer to use safe drinking water rather than contribute to polluting the environment.
- Spare batteries — our trips have access to power to recharge batteries for phones and cameras most days, but we recommend you take spare batteries for your camera.
- Electrical travel adapter plug.
- Inner sleep sheet/bag for added comfort during overnight stays.
- Money belt.
- Torch or flash light.
- Hand sanitizer.
- Neck pillow for those long, bumpy drives,

OPTIONAL

- Ear plugs to guard against street noise and snorers.
- A good book, a journal, and music player for longer drives.
- Walking poles if needed.
- Images from home — during our trip there will be many opportunities for you to meet and talk with locals. One way to start any conversation is with pictures. We recommend that you bring some photos / postcards of your family, home, city or country where you live, animals peculiar to your country etc.

VALUABLES

Please try to avoid bringing unnecessary valuables, and use your hotel safe. We strongly recommend that you photocopy all important documents e.g. air tickets, passport,

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vaccination certificates, etc. and keep the copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a photocopy makes it very much easier to obtain replacements if necessary.

CURRENCY

Mongolia

The official currency of Mongolia is the Tugreg. Mongolia is a mainly cash economy with most small businesses and shops unable to take credit card. Only change money at officially authorized currency exchanges; these are often found at Banks, hotels and shopping malls. There are ATMS in Ulaanbaatar and other larger towns, but none in rural areas and they may not always accept foreign cards or have enough cash to dispense. US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency; other currencies such as Euros, UK sterling, Russian Rubles, and Chinese Renminbi can be exchanged in Ulaanbaatar.

TRAVELLING ON A GROUP TRIP

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling together. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too.

We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group — patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting.

We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well — this takes just a little effort on your part.

Due to privacy reasons we are unable to provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travellers booked on your trip prior to departure.

IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTES

- As a responsible tour operator, your safety is our priority. Mongolia is a safe country to visit, but your tour leader and local guides will be able to advise you further about travel in this location.
- This tour is not suited for children under the age of 12 (please check with Tour Manager if you would like to bring a child on the tour), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed) and camping in more remote locations.

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- If you have a medical condition which may affect your health or safety during your trip you must inform us before visa application.
- After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails so you can keep in touch, swap photos etc. If you do not wish to be on this list then please let us know.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

CANCELLATION If the tour is cancelled by our partners, we will fully refund the tour price. Please note this tour is charged in US\$. If we receive any other currency this will be converted to US\$ on that day's exchange rate fixed by the Bank of China. Any refund will be made according to the US\$ amount we received and not the original currency sent. With all refunds Koryo Tours will not be held liable for any bank charges. We do have a deadline for cancellations although due to the nature of travel in Mongolia we may need to book certain services earlier such as flights and hotels. In many cases these are none refundable. Your tour manager will let you know when this needs to be done. After this it would be impossible to offer a full refund should you then need to cancel.

STANDARD DISCLAIMER: Koryo Tours reserves the right to withdraw service and cancel a tour at any time. In this eventuality a full refund of any monies paid by the customer will be made.

Koryo Tours cannot be held responsible for any mishap to yourself or your property and in particular any consequence or effects of flight/train cancellation/delay, robbery, sickness, government intervention or other such happenings.

INSURANCE Koryo Tours insist that tourists travelling on all of our tours have full medical insurance. You are advised to insure yourself against any possible risk that may occur and in particular to ensure that sufficient insurance has been obtained in respect of any dependant relatives. It is your responsibility to be covered by insurance which must include medical expenses and the cost of repatriation should you become too ill to continue.