



BEYOND THE STEPPE TOUR – MONGOLIA 2021

TOUR OVERVIEW

July 2900 USD
12-night tour in Mongolia

SUMMARY

This fantastic tour is carefully 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 Ulgii city, located within the Kazakh area of Mongolia, known as Bayan Ulgii. This mountainous region is stunningly beautiful; it is pitted with lush green valley's all the while surrounded by snow-capped mountains. We will make our way through this area by visiting the Tavan Bogd National Park; this Park borders China and Russia and is home to the Friendship Peak and a fantastic glacier. After our mountain hike, we visit the base of this glacier. We later make our way to the town of Hovd, where we will visit a nomadic family for a truly local experience. Here we will also meet a real 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. While in Hovd we will also catch the local Naadam festival.

Naadam festival is the most important holiday and celebration in Mongolia. The origins of the festival date back to past the time of Chinggis Khan in the 13th century. As it was initially 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 an excellent opportunity for the young to meet, chat, and possibly meet a future partner. For those not so interested in the three main games, Nadaam gives an excellent chance for people-watching, as well as for viewing the various stalls with their 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.

The Experts in Travel to Rather Unusual Destinations.

WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

Many passengers visit Mongolia every year, but many only scratch the surface by stopping while 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 of 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.

Map & Overview

DAY 1	Arrival in Ulaanbaatar
DAY 2	Fly to Bayan Olgii. Drive to Khar Us Lake
DAY 3	Drive to Khurgan & Khoton Lakes
DAY 4	Khoton Lake
DAY 5	Drive to Shiveet Khairkan.
DAY 6	Hike (or ride) to Tavan Bogd
DAY 7	Drive to Tsengle
DAY 8	Return to Bayan Olgii
DAY 9	Drive to Tolbo Lake
DAY 10	Drive to Hovd
DAY 11	Nadaam Festival
DAY 12	Fly to Ulaanbaatar
DAY 13	Departure Day

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DAILY ITINERARY

JULY 1ST – THURSDAY (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 choose 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 whose statue marks the place where his horse was seen urinating while on parade in 1921. The figures of Genghis Khan and his top 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 step out and explore the city.

JULY 2ND – FRIDAY (DAY 2)

Tour of the city, and then fly to Bayan Ulgii

We start our day at Gandantegchinlen, Ulaanbaatar's largest Buddhist monastery, where we can see practising monks and learn about the role of Mongolia's largest religion. Then it's back to the city centre, where we'll stop off for supplies at the State Department Store. Today privately owned, this is a throwback to the old Soviet sales system, where everything is under one roof, and you pay with multiple receipts before returning for your purchases. This is an ideal time to stock up on trip supplies, even outdoor gear, so if you've discovered your sleeping bag has a hole, now's the time to upgrade. We'll see Sükhbaatar Square by day and then head to the National Historical Museum, which takes us through Mongolian history from the Stone Age right through to the collapse of Communism.

After lunch, we'll take a two-hour flight to Bayan Olgii, and pile into Russian jeeps as we begin our drive as soon as we arrive out beyond Sagasi village, near Khar Us Lake and the magnificent Altai Mountains. Bayan-Olgii (or Ugli) 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, practising Muslims and Mongolia's most significant ethnic minority; here we'll learn about how nomadic life in the mountains differs from life on the steppe.



We'll stop by mud-brick winter houses Kazakhs use when the temperature drops below minus-30 when even their felt-lined *gers* can't keep out the cold. We can also ride horses and learn about eagle hunting – not what you think! Up here, food is scarce, and the locals need a little help. Most families keep their golden eagles that hunt for rabbit, hare, and even small deer, and they're happy to show us how it's done. Then we'll pitch our tents next to the local families and share a traditional dinner.

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 person's basis, but single options are available upon booking. We'll be camping next to a local family on this night.

JULY 3RD – SATURDAY (DAY 3)

Khurgan and Khoton Lakes

AM

- Today's journey takes us through wildlands, over moraines (glacial debris), and past ancient burial sites, with stone-age rock carvings of animals and hunting scenes covering the mountainside. The spectacular Khurgan and Khoton Lakes lie at an altitude of 2,073 meters and 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 many *gers* 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 a local family on this night.

JULY 4TH – SUNDAY (DAY 4)

Khoton Lake

Today is a day of leisure, 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 up 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 refreshing mountain river, one of its streams, or at the lake's 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 beautifully framed against the mountains.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

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

JULY 5TH – MONDAY (DAY 5)

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 journeys before breaking off into the wilderness again. We will drive across high mountain passes, and past ancient burial sites and old Turkic standing stones, which date back to 2000BC. Eventually, we will follow a the 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 is 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 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 impressive – we'll be surrounded by snow-capped mountains and able to listen to the roar of the white river.

JULY 6TH – TUESDAY (DAY 6)

Hike to the base camp of Altai Tavan

Bogd AM

- Today we leave our vehicles and most cumbersome 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 fantastic 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 breakfast; toilet facilities are provided. The area we stay in is remote yet beautiful, as it is at the base of the central mountain range and only a stone's throw from the main glacier.

JULY 7TH - WEDNESDAY (DAY 7)

Return trek to Tsagaan Gol (White River) and on to Tsengle

Today we follow the camels 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 board our trucks once more as we drive on and continue the adventure. We have a long drive down through this incredible glacial pass past small deserted Kazakh winter villages as the valley opens up on our approach to the small local rural town of Tsengle.

Here we meet local nomads who choose to make their life living part of the year by the river; we will have a stop in the village itself and enjoy our evening in this relaxing setting.

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 8TH – THURSDAY (DAY 8)

Drive through Bayan Olgii

Today we bid farewell to our Nomadic friends and take a scenic 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. If we're lucky, we may also catch a local festival nestled in this mountainous region. This afternoon we will have time to explore the regional capital Olgii, its central square, ageing museum, local market or rest in one of the locally-owned coffee shops after snapping up a few souvenirs.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight:

tourist ger camp: We stay in one of the tourist Ger areas found on the outskirts of Olgii city. This camp offers a shower block with warm running water and wash facilities as well as a restaurant area from where our chef can provide some more delicious food.

JULY 9TH – FRIDAY (DAY 9)

Drive to Tolbo Lake

After stopping for a few snacks, we make our journey to Tolbo Lake. The drive today is a smooth run on the sealed road. Tolbo has an altitude of 2,080 meters; it is famous not only for its remote beauty but as the site of a crucial 1921 battle between the Bolshevik and White Russian forces – the 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, then 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. There will be time for some optional hiking in the surrounding mountains which offer stunning views over the lake.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Tourist ger camp: We stay in a tourist ger camp found on the shores of the lake where you may swim relax or enjoy a sauna.

JULY 10TH - SATURDAY (DAY10)

A morning swim, a Shaman visit and an afternoon around Hovd market

This morning after the brave amongst the group have taken a chilly early morning dip in the lake its back into our Russian trucks for our drive to Hovd town. When we arrive in Hovd, we will visit the local Uriankhai shaman and his family. Here we can witness some of the ancient and mysterious rituals that the community still holds dear, such as mirrors that repel evil spirits, or sacred fire and water. After we visit the Shamans home, This afternoon we drive back to Hovd town where we will settle into our Gers in preparation for tomorrows Naadam festival. We will have time to pay a visit to the local market and catch the last rush as people to prepare their best clothes for the big day.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, dinner

Overnight:

Tourist Ger camp: One of only two camps found around the city of Hovd. This camp has terrific views over the surrounding countryside while being situated on the outskirts of the central city. It has a separate shower block and facility for our chef to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner.

JULY 11TH – SUNDAY (DAY 11)

Experience the local Mongolian 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 buses and day visitors, Hovd's event is still a local affair, virtually unchanged over generations. Hovd town is a rural town a hub for many Mongolians gathering for this fantastic event.

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.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Ger

JULY 12TH – MONDAY (DAY 12)

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 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.

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 step out and explore the city.



JULY 13TH – TUESDAY (DAY13 DEPARTURE DAY)

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.

ACCOMMODATION

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 while 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. While 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 exploration. Your tour guide will be able to advise on the options when you arrive. While camping, we will have a cook journey with us cooking a fusion of western and Mongolian dishes.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Vegetarian food choices can be minimal once we leave Ulaanbaatar, although our chef may be able to take special dietary requirements into account on 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.

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.

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 needed.

PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you can carry and lift your 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, we recommend lightweight clothing plus some warm layers for that night time temperature drop in high desert areas and the mountains of Mongolia. A good waterproof jacket is always a bonus in case we experience more torrential rains which can occur.
- 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 a very low overnight in the Mountainous areas. If you get cold quickly, 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 large main piece of luggage (lockable) soft holdall, kitbag or frameless rucksack although hard cases can be accepted. 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 the cost of approximately \$3 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-litre 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 extra batteries for your camera.
- Electrical travel adapter plug.
- Inner sleep sheet/bag for added comfort during overnight stays.
- Money belt.
- Torch or flashlight.
- Hand sanitizer.
- Neck pillow for those long, bumpy drives,

OPTIONAL

- Earplugs can be a bonus to guard against street noise and snorers.
- A good book, journal and music player can be an excellent choice for long drives.
- Walking/ trekking 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 relevant documents, e.g. air tickets, passport, vaccination certificates, etc. and keep the copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a photocopy makes it easier to obtain replacements if necessary.

CURRENCY

The official currency of Mongolia is the Tugreg. Mongolia is predominantly a cash economy with most small businesses and shops unable to take a 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 specific 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 before 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 tour), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed) and camping in more remote locations.
- If you have a medical condition which may affect your health or safety during your trip, you must inform us before the 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 our partners cancel the tour, 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.