



Mongolia Explorer

12 Days

Day 1 | Ulaanbaatar

Squares and Dancing

Upon arrival at Chinggis Khan International Airport, a driver will be waiting to transfer you to the group's accommodations in Ulaanbaatar. Depending on city traffic, it's a one to two hour ride—this is your first introduction to the capital of Mongolia. It's a contrast of modern design, Neoclassical buildings, monasteries, garment factories and Soviet-era buildings.

Late afternoon, we have an orientation and time to refresh and reset before we walk to tonight's show and dinner. En route, we cross central Sükhbaatar Square (named after Mongolia's revolutionary hero, Damdin Sükhbaatar).

We will attend the popular Tumen Ekh Cultural Show which is a lively performance of folk music, traditional music, dance and contortion! Music is an extension of the Mongolian heart with songs expressing freedom and harmony with nature.

After the dazzling show, we gather for dinner, get to know each other, and share travel stories together.

Included Meals

Dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Nine (twin share ensuite)

Travel

1–2 hours or 31 miles/50km (driving, depending on city traffic)



Day 2 | Ulaanbaatar

A Heartfelt Day

Ulaanbaatar is home to nearly half of Mongolia's population and is the beating heart of the nation and modern urban life.

We visit the revered Gandan, Mongolia's principal monastery, where we will receive a sacred blessing for our journey ahead. Afterwards, under the tutelage of the inspiring women supported by the Made in Mongolia (MIM) felting project we learn about the world of felt making and Asral Mongolia's invaluable humanitarian work.

In the workshop we have the opportunity to practice the thousand-year-old traditional art form and learn more about MIM. Many of the women at MIM are from single-parent households at high risk of experiencing extreme poverty and malnourishment. The contemporary handcrafted slippers and felt products the women produce are made with wool sourced from the Mongolian steppe region and Gobi Desert.

Following lunch at a nearby eatery, we spend time with one of Mongolia's top bow and arrow craftsmen in his home workshop. A traditional Mongolian bow is made of wood, horn, sinew, leather and animal glue and can take six months to a year to be fully shaped. Arrows are made of bone or wood and feathers from birds of prey for the shaft.

We have the opportunity to learn the precise art of archery with a female student using one of his meticulously handcrafted bows and arrows at the national archery arena, putting a bull's eye on a perfect day in Ulaanbaatar.

Our day culminates over dinner together in a local restaurant.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Nine (twin share ensuite)



Day 3 | Khogno Khan Nature Reserve

Sleep in the Sand Dunes

We leave the hum of the city behind for a day of pure adventure in Khogno Khan Nature Reserve. It's going to be a bumpy, humpy, slow but scenic drive of six to seven hours depending on road conditions.

This is a super natural landscape of mountain forest steppes, mountains, Gobi-type desert and mineral waters. Wolves, deer, and fox inhabit this serene area that was once the site of brutal Middle Age feuds between Western and Eastern Mongolians (Dzungaria and Khalkh Mongolia) after the collapse of the Mongol Empire.

We have a picnic in the vastness of this landscape before meeting our welcoming hosts in Khogno Khan. The native Davaasuren family have lived in this region for generations. We will experience Mongolian daily life in an intimate way as guests in their simple gers located at the base of the otherworldly Elsen Tasarhai sand dunes. These dunes are part of the Great Mongolian Sand Dunes and stretch over 50 miles (80km).

There will be time to unwind or absorb the surroundings on a contemplative walk before dinner. Serenity will be felt in the simplicity of our accommodations and warm hospitality of the Davaasuren's. Four to six women will share a ger and experience Mongolian family life with Davaasuren's beloved herd of horses and camels.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Simple shared group ger at a small family-operated ger camp (2–4 or 4–6 women per ger). Please note there are no shower facilities and toilets are outdoor long drop Asian-style.

Travel

6–7 hours (not including stops) or 177 miles (285 km) on dirt and asphalt road on Day 3. Driving speed ranges between 19–40 miles (30–65 km/hr) due to the road surface and condition. Roads typically transition from smooth gravel, corrugated surfaces, rocks, tree roots and mud depending on the location and weather. It can be physically tiring traveling but this is the nature of driving in Mongolia.



Day 4 | Khogno Khan Nature Reserve

Camel Trekking

Today we embark on a two hour camel trek to venture deeper into the shifting landscapes of Khogno Khan. From desert dunes to mountains, rushing rivers and jade grassland, the views are ever-changing.

After lunch we visit Erdene Khambiin Khiid temple which is also known as The Lama Erdene Monastery or Ovgon Monastery. Located at the foot of Khögnö Khan Mountain the 17th-century monastery was built by Saint Zanabazar (a renowned sculptor and most notable representative of Buddhism in Mongolia). In 1990, the granddaughter of one of the monks who resided at Ovgon was instrumental in the restoration of the monastery after the democratic revolution. At its height, this secluded sanctuary housed more than one thousand lamas at the same time.

During the temple visit there are opportunities to walk up to 3 hours, following a birch-bordered path to exceptional panoramas.

Tonight we stay in our shared gers and revel in our remarkable surroundings.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Simple shared group ger at a small family-operated ger camp (2–4 or 4–6 women per ger). Please note there are no shower facilities and toilets are outdoor long drop Asian-style



Day 5 | Tsetserleg

Mountains, Markets and Museums

Today we give our camel trekking bums a rest as we drive through Arkhangai Aimag to reach Tsetserleg, the provincial capital that lies in the northeastern slopes of the Khangai Mountains 250 miles (400 km) southwest of Ulaanbaatar. Tsetserleg is overlooked by the behemoth 6,407 foot (1,953m) Bulgan Uul mountain and the cluster of homes with multi-coloured roofs seems fictional. Here, we can stretch our legs and taste buds as we explore the lively local market.

At Galdan Zuu Temple, we have a stunning view of the alpine town before visiting the Museum of Arkhangai Province, housed in the last three courtyard temples of the former Zayain Khüree Monastery. The museum, notable for its Mongolian and Tibetan architecture, features Buddhist exhibits, a detailed model of the original monastery and displays of traditional Mongolian life.

We can also visit the Fairfield Cafe and support the small community of Arkhangai. Year-round employment is offered to as many locals as possible in this area that sees an ever-growing

job-seeking migration to Ulaanbaatar. Try fresh wholemeal, barley and carrot bread from the bakery. Fun fact: Fairfield Cafe is the first (and currently only) place you can order pizza in Arkhangai!

Today's schedule is flexible to allow for independent exploration and discovery at your own desired pace. Dinner is also independent tonight.

Included Meals

Breakfast and lunch

Accommodations

Khangain Tugul or Ashid Bekei Hotel

Travel

Approximately 6 hours or 134 miles (215km) on dirt and asphalt road (not including stops)



Day 6 | Tsenkher

Yak and Walk

We have a two hour drive to meet our gracious hosts, the Galbadrakh family, in Tsenkher. They are a young group of yak herders and we have the unique opportunity to experience their daily life and learn about sustainable herding and the local economy from Bor, the Galbadrakh family's mother.

The Galbadrakh family is part of the Cooperative Ar Arvijin Delgerekh, a NGO that supports yak herders in the Arkhangai Province. This organization supports the production of spun yak down, a refined process that significantly boosts the herders' income by allowing them to sell their harvest at higher prices than at the local market.

The surrounding undulating hills and panoramas of this vast steppe are designed for slow, meditative walks which we can take before returning to our hotel. Note: The half-day hike is optional!

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Khangain Tugul or Ashid Bekei Hotel

Travel

Approximately 2 hours



Day 7 | Kharkhorin

Unscripted Learning

Today we travel for four hours to Kharkhorin, the former (13th-century) capital of Ogodei Khan and the Mongol Empire. Kharkhorin served as a vital cultural crossroads on the Silk Road and is known for its symbolic stone turtles (two are still visible). Four turtles were originally set in Kharkhorin in a spiritual attempt to ward off floods and assure an eternal life. Turtles also symbolize longevity, solidarity and independence.

We can explore Erdene Zuu, Mongolia's oldest monastery, and immerse ourselves in the rich heritage archives at the Kharkhorin Museum. This collection breathes life into the region's past and is renowned for its exhibits tracing the history of the Orkhon River Valley and the Turkish and Mongol Empire. A turtle's pace is required to take it all in!

At the elaborate nonprofit Erdenesiinn Khuree Centre of Mongolian Arts and Calligraphy, we have a private calligraphy lesson. At the creation of his empire, Genghis Khan established the official Uyghur script, "Ancient Mongolian," which is the true origin of Mongolian calligraphy. This

experience provides a creative connection to Mongolia's vibrant culture and past. Built in 2019, the Erdenesiin Khuree Center is eager to preserve the traditional script and Mongolian calligraphy which has been declared “an intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding” by UNESCO.

For the next three nights we are staying in one of the newest ger camps in Kharkhorin. The Silk Road Camp is run by the Mongolian Secret History company and was built to reflect the design of Ogodei Khan's palace. The camp is located 1.8 miles (3km) southeast of Erdene Zuu Monastery—expect startling, sweeping views.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Twin-share ger at Secrets of the Silk Road standard ger camp with flush toilets and hot showers in a separate block

Travel

Approximately 4 hours or 81 miles (130km) on dirt and asphalt roads (not including stops)



Day 8 | Orkhon River Valley

Daily Rhythms

Today we will be welcomed into the home of Tumee and Jargaa, a dedicated herding family. It's a short 30-minute drive to their house. We shadow the daily rhythms of our hosts' life and sink into the undiluted beauty of this region. The Orkhon River Valley is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and stands as a testament to Mongolia's nomadic heritage and cultural evolution.

Often referred to as the "cradle of Mongolian civilization," this area is a deep glimpse into the nomadic way of life. The Orkhon River remains a vital lifeline and precious resource for herders and future generations.

For those who are energetic, a half-day hike can be organized to truly experience the wilds on foot.

Tonight's dinner will be a memorable one as it will be prepared by and shared with Tumee and Jargaa in their home.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Twin-share ger at Secrets of the Silk Road standard ger camp with flush toilets and hot showers in a separate block

Travel

Short drives in the surrounding area



Day 9 | Orkhon River Valley

Choose Your Own Adventure

Today's schedule is as flexible as the contortionists we saw perform in Ulaanbaatar on our first day! We can opt for a peaceful, personal day to simply relax or tailor the day to the group's interest and energy levels.

Other options include visiting Tume and Jargaa's home, or exploring the Kharkhorin region once more. For those up for a bigger adventure, we will visit the spiritual retreat of Zanabazar, the Tovkhon Khiid Monastery. This is a full day trip (2 hour drive one way) and involves a challenging 3 km hike up a steep hill (and back down again!). Our guide can share more details about the terrain and duration and today's options.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Twin-share ger at Secrets of the Silk Road standard ger camp with flush toilets and hot showers in a separate block

Travel

Driving time will be dependent on the day's plans



Day 10 | Khustain Nuruu National Park

Sunday Drive

We have a full-day drive to Khustain Nuruu National Park and the home of our ger camp hosts, the Batchuluun family. It will be six to eight hours of travel—a seated shoulder massage train may be in order!

Upon arrival, we can relax or expand our felt skills with a refresher lesson from our host. The family is a member of the cooperative and this additional income has been a reassuring boost to creative independence and financial security.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Simple shared group ger (2–4 or 4–6 women per ger) at a small family-operated ger camp with no showers and outdoor Asian-style long drop toilets.

Travel

Approximately 6–8 hours or 217 miles (350 km) on dirt and asphalt road



Day 11 | Khustain Nuruu National Park and Ulaanbaatar

In Search of Wild Horses

Khustain Nuruu National Park is one of Mongolia’s conservation success stories and noted for its thriving reintroduction of the endemic Przewalski horse. The “Takhi” is the only wild horse to survive in modern times.

We begin our journey with a visit to the national park’s dynamic information center where the park’s invaluable environmental research and conservation projects and successes are vividly showcased.

Inside the park we'll gain an immediate and deeper insight into the park's efforts to protect the diverse wildlife and the precious wild space in the company of one of the park's dedicated biologists. We search for red deer, elusive corsac foxes, Siberian marmots, black vultures and circling birds of prey.

Sightings of the free-roaming Takhi horses that traverse the hills and mountains of the national park always elicit goosebumps. Naturally, these wild encounters are not guaranteed but every effort will be made to experience this signature moment.

It's a three hour drive to our hotel in Ulaanbaatar where we'll gather for a relaxed and reflective informal farewell dinner to share our favorite Mongolian memories.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Twin share at Hotel Nine

Included Meals

Approximately 3–4 hours (depending on city traffic) or 93 miles (150km)



Day 12 | Departure

Mongolian Memories

You may book your departure flight at any time today. Keep in mind that the transfer time to Chinggis Khan International Airport is approximately 1–2 hours but can be longer depending on city traffic in Ulaanbaatar.

Included Meals

Breakfast



Trip Details

Know Before You Go

For all of the logistical details you'll need to know prior to departure—including the packing list, arrival and departure details and suggested tipping information, click [HERE](#).

Itinerary version as of May 22, 2024.