



Photo: Mark Johnstad



Photos: Jan Wigsten



## The Gobi Steppes - Arburd Sands

*Surprisingly near the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar is the northernmost reach of the Gobi steppe; treeless grasslands that stretch to the horizon and beyond. The Mongol nomadic steppe culture is intact here. They are an equestrian people, who have been on horseback and living in gers (yurts) since before the construction of the Great Wall of China, which divided the Mongol and Chinese realms. The locals at Arburd Sands have horses, cows, sheep, goats and camels. You will explore an area where the steppe gives way to sandy subsoil and where there is a 20 km long sand dune. All of the herdsmen lead a traditional way of life out here.*

### Brief Outline Itinerary

On this short journey we will drive south from Ulaanbaatar with a private guide and private vehicle until the Gobi steppe starts to emerge. You will stay at a low impact ger (yurt) camp, a fully collapsible Ger built in the nomadic style. We use low-impact indigenous, and thus appropriate, technology to offer lodging and sometimes also transportation, with the assistance of camel carts, riding camels or riding horses. Essentially, it means that we can be hosted by the services of the local people living in the area where we travel.

#### Day 1: Ulaanbaatar

A.m. Pick up at your hotel. Drive south over the treeless steppe for some 4 hours to Arburd Sands. Lunch en-route. Stop to visit some nomadic families. Our hosts in the area are related to one third of the nomadic population scattered over the steppe here.

#### Day 2: Zorgol Hairhan Mountains

Drive 35 km across the steppe to the holy Zorgol Hairhan Mountains. These are giant rock formations coming up almost vertically out of the middle of the Gobi steppe. En route we will find some secluded petroglyphs of extraordinary quality. We will explore the area and perhaps have a chance to view the rare and elusive Argali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*), the largest wild mountain sheep in the world. There is also a chance to see Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) on the ridges. Only with luck will we see them, and almost always at a far distance. Zorgol Hairhan is a sacred mountain and there are many traces of holy sites in such places as caves and springs, where local people make offerings.



### Day 3: Arburd Sands

Explore the immediate area of Arburd Sands. We may use camels to trek or ride through the middle of the sand dunes. Arburd Sands is a 20km long sand dune. Strangely enough, a good number of wolves - being wary of man - have taken refuge in these dunes and can sometimes be seen. There will be one or two riding camels so that we can try riding them as well. We will make contact with other herdsmen. We will no doubt be invited into the gers and will learn about their ancient lifestyle.

### Day 4: Bogd Uul Biosphere Reserve

A.m. drive back to Ulaanbaatar. On the way we will visit the Bogd Uul Biosphere Reserve and the site of the ruins of Manzhir monastery. This is the southernmost point of the taiga with some nice forests. Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) can usually be seen here. Back in Ulaanbaatar, there will be some free time to explore the city.

### Practicalities

**Staff:** A Mongolian guide will accompany you at all times. The service will be in English. In addition, the services of the local herdsmen will be hired along with their animals.

**Riding skills:** Complete horse riding novices should not attempt to ride individually on horses. However, the Mongols were historically the most equestrian people on Earth and remain so today. Anyone at ease with horses will enjoy riding here. Use of riding horses is included in the tour cost. If you are a keen and competent horse rider, please let us know beforehand, so that we can pre-arrange the right horse for you. For this, we need your age, height and weight in advance. You should moreover be insured for this activity. Mongolian horses are peculiar and horsemanship is somewhat different among the Mongols as compared to home. We suggest you bring your own riding hat with you, since it could be difficult to find one that would have a proper fit in Mongolia.

**Meals:** Our cooks prepare the meals. We pride ourselves in having cooks adept at

both western and Mongolian cooking on our trips. There are always vegetables available and we have no problem accommodating vegetarians.

#### PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar:

**USD 600 per person**

Single Supplement: **USD 30 per night**

Additional night: **USD 100 per night**

**Includes:** Private guide, private vehicle and all meals outside Ulaanbaatar and accommodation in Gers (3n.) plus all local transport.

**Excludes:** Imported drinks, laundry. Air or train tickets in and out of Mongolia. Visa fee. Airport transfers and hotels in Ulaanbaatar, they may be added to your costs if needed.

#### DATES ex Ulaanbaatar 2010-2011:

Daily Mid September through October and April and May. Not available November through March.

**GerScapes:** We offer a number of true Ger Escapes in selected scenic places around Mongolia. It is one or two Gers for your private use, supported by a cook and local guide. It is a kind of five star camping off the beaten track in Great Landscapes. The selection of each Ger-Scape location has a purpose. This is at scenic Arburd Sands, where we support local livelihoods, where you in privacy of the whole area, may hike around the sanddunes and befriend with the locals.

Reservations: