



Photos: Claes Grundsten



Altai Mountains- Camel Supported Trek to the Glaciers

The Altai Mountains, with eternal snowcapped peaks and glaciers, are the highest of the three major mountain ranges in Mongolia, straddling the Russian and Chinese frontiers in the Far West. In this remote region live many nomads of various ethnic minorities. The Kazakhs are Muslims and speak the ancient Kazakh language. The Tuvans are Buddhist and shamanistic. This dramatic journey will bring us to Mongolia's highest mountain region. We will start the trek from the lakes region, through Altai Tavanbogd National Park, to the Potanin glacier supported by pack camels and locals. In order to get into the glaciers area we will cross the high Altai. Local Kazakh herdsmen keep their priceless Golden Eagles next to their yurts.

Brief Outline Itinerary

On our journey we will use low-impact traditional modes of transport. Our equipment will be carried on pack-camels, and also, possibly, pack-horses. We will fly to western Mongolia on an almost 4 hour domestic flight from Ulaanbaatar. We will transfer out to the mountain regions from Ölgii, the Kazakh provincial capital, by 4wd local vehicles. Our crew will be Kazakhs and/or Tuvan. The local guide is trilingual at least English, Mongol and Kazakh. Possibly also Tuvan and Russian.

Day 1: To Ölgii

Meet your local Kazakh guide upon arriving at Ölgii airport or report to the bar of the Blue Wolf Restaurant in Ölgii, 17h00 at the latest. You will meet your local guide there. Drive half an hour west to Sagsay village and check in at the ger camp. Dinner in the big Kazakh yurt (ger).

Day 2: To Dayan Lake

We start our journey by a drive through the Hargant Valley to Altai Tavanbogd National Park passing below snow-capped Tsengel Hairhan Uul (3043m). Tuvans live here. They are Buddhists, but of a Turkic speaking ethnic group. Their gers (yurts) are more like Mongol gers as opposed to the larger Kazakh ones. After picnic lunch, continue our drive and reach Dayan Lake, near the frontier with China. Many Kazakh nomadic families use this area in the summer months for their summer grazing. There is good fishing and stunning sunsets. Dayan Lake is also home of many birds as duck, geese, swans and many others. Meet horses and camels. Overnight in tent.

Day 3: To Baga Turgen Uul

We will load our equipment onto pack-camels and/or pack-horses and start hiking across to Hurgan Lake and its western shore. Full day trek through the dramatic steppe valley where the Hovd River that drains from the a series of glacial lakes from the Tavanbogd glacial massif. Our impressive camel caravan comes out to the steppe valleys. The Kazakh families yurts are a bonanza of handicraft. To the west we see the snowcapped forested mountains with forest which divides China and Mongolia.

Days 4-5: To Hoton Lake

Continued trek passing the elongated Hoton Lake, just below the snow-capped Ikh Turgen Uul. We are now only 10km from the China border. A fishing rod comes in handy here. The largest subspecies of Mongolian Grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) is easily fished here. The numerous Great Cormorants in the vicinity are a good indicator that there are plentiful fish in the lakes.



Days 6-7: To Bear Valley

Trek up a valley with patches of Larch forests and have a picnic lunch near the so-called Green Lake. Small streams that develop into rivers originate here. Small streams that develop into rivers originate here. They are fed by melting glaciers which flow down broad steppe valleys. They are fed by melting glaciers which flow down broad steppe valleys. Surrounding the valley are mountains and forested hills of larch. Along the rivers there are wooded and alluvial meadows with broad leaf forests. After few hours trekking come the scenic valley, which the locals call Bear Valley. Pitch camp next to a small waterfall. The next day an opportunity to day hike in this scenic area of the Altais.

Days 8-9: Altai Mountains crossing

We have allocated two full days for the crossing of the Altai Mountain range, the total distance being 32km. We will pitch camp before the snowy area. Certainly big game such as Snow Leopards and its prey species live here, but they are extremely difficult to see. Perhaps you may see Altai Snowcock, the highest altitude living bird of Mongolia. We will cross the Altai at the highest elevation of some 3600m and have broad views across the Altais. We will be near the peak of Tsagaan Hairhan Uul (3662m).

Day 10: To Shiveet Hairhan

Trek down to Shiveet Hairhan Mountain, where the Tuva people live. Here we will now be able to view the largest petroglyphs from the period of the Xiongnu (approx 200 B.C.) which dates from the time when the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huangdi started building the Great Wall of China.

Days 11-13: Tavanbogd massif

Trek for 6km toward the base camp of the snow-capped Tavanbogd massif. Pitch camp next to the 20km long Potanina glacier – the biggest of the twenty glaciers in Mongolian Altai. Remain there for two nights. Tavanbogd means “The Holy Five”, referring to the five highest peaks, of which Huiten Uul is the highest in Mongolia, 4374 meters above sea level. Quite a considerable height at this latitude. It is a stunning setting with the awe-inspiring massif of high snow-capped peaks. For a full day we will make day hikes to the Malchin Uul. This is a non-technical climbs. On the last day trek back on the far side of the Tsagaan River and pitch camp, and the pick up vehicles will arrive this camp site tonight. We may have a chance to view Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) here.

Day 14: To Ölgii

Drive via Ulaanhuus over desert mountain landscapes, with the snow-capped Tsambagarav Mountain ahead. We will find numerous petroglyphs and Turkic stones along the Sogoo River basin. Bayan-Ölgii is rich in archaeological remains, as a reminder of the time of the Turkic invasions. Arrive back to the ger camp at Sagsay village.

Day 15: Ölgii and out

After breakfast, drive a short way (30 minutes) to Ölgii. The bazaar in Ölgii is interesting, as well as the mosque, which has been renovated in recent times. We usually have the whole morning to visit Ölgii. There are some very interesting back street handicraft shops and a well-stocked local museum. In the afternoon, flights leave for Ulaanbaatar. You may – at additional cost – add a transfer to Hovd (5-6h).

Practicalities

Transport: Local nomadic families frequently move from one pasture to another using pack-camels or pack-horses. The services of some local herdsmen will be hired by the expedition and they will provide us with their animals.

Staff: A Kazakh leader will accompany the group at all times in Bayan-Ölgii. The service will be in English. There will also be a cook. In addition, the services of the local herdsmen will be hired along with their animals.

Meals: Our cook will 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 on our trips.

Alternative Connections to Ölgii: If interested in entering or exiting across the land border with Russia, we can pick you up or leave you at Barnaul, in southern Siberia (Russia).

PRICE ex Ölgii

USD 1950 per person (min 2 members)

Single supplement USD 420.

Includes: All meals. All overnights in ger camp (2n.) and tents (12n.), camping equipment and all local transport. Border permits. If you fly to/from Ulaanbaatar airport on trip dates transfers there are included.

Excludes: Imported drinks, rent of riding horse. Flights. Visa fee. Domestic flights. USD 414 each way UB-Ölgii (price of 2010).

DATES ex Ölgii 2011: (Tue-Tue)

AT01: 28Jun - 12Jul

AT02: 12 - 26Jul

AT03: 26Jul - 09Aug

AT04: 09 - 23Aug

AT05: 23Aug - 06Sep

AT06: 06 - 20Sep (includes the Eagle Festival)

Please note the last trip for the season will be modified in such a way to spend less days in the lakes area at the beginning of the trek in order to include the Eagle Festival in Sagsay at the end of the journey.