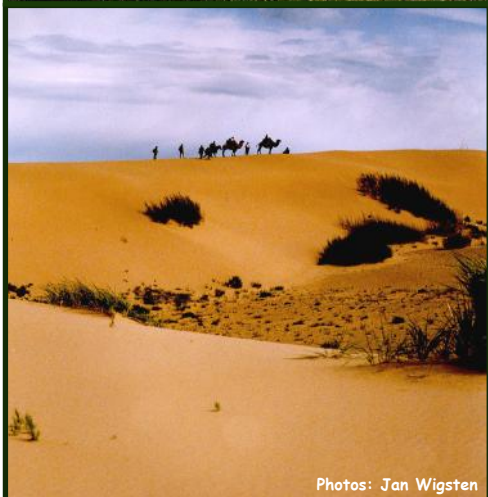




Photo: Haroldo Castro



Photos: Jan Wigsten

Gobi Steppe Ride camel carts supported

A horseback journey across the Mongolian steppelands is an experience not available elsewhere on Earth. Steppe habitats once made up 25 percent of the global land area. Today the Pampas, the puszta, the Prairies and the Ukraine have largely been developed for agricultural output. Only the Mongolian steppe has survived. The high elevation of Mongolia creates unusually clear air-all the year round. It is an overwhelming visual experience of emptiness and vastness to ride across the completely silent treeless steppe, completely devoid of any fences. Stretching away into the distance: no trace of human activity except for the pastoralist's - themselves and their herds.

Brief Outline Itinerary

The bus will take us out of Ulaanbaatar to the south, some 120-150 km over the treeless steppe until we find a family of famous horsebreeders and their gers. We will select some good riding horses among the hundreds available, saddle up, and ride until the steppe starts to give way for the Gobi sands. Our gear will be loaded upon traditional wooden carts, the same type as used by the locals. Bactrian Camels will pull the carts.

Day 01 Ulaanbaatar

Arrive at the Mongolian capital and transfer to the hotel. Tour briefing after dinner.

Day 02 To southern Töv

A.m. Drive south and continue across the steppe to a place in the middle of nowhere called Holboo. Pitch camp by nomad horsebreeders. Selection of horses. Briefing and short ride. Overnight in tents.

Day 03 To Saran Tolgoy

Today we will start our ride across the steppe for 20km. Gobi high altitude fauna such as argali sheep (*Ovis ammon*) are present in the hills and rocks, and quite possibly, if lucky, may be seen during this day. Moreover, small herds of gazelle may be seen on the steppe, and perhaps some wolves.

Day 04 To Elsen Hudag

Full day 20-25km ride across the steppe to the smaller sands at Manhan. It is a small sand dune which has cut its way through the steppe, as if moving by itself, but it is actually pushed by strong winds towards the east. We continue the ride to Elsen Hudag. Hudag means "well" in Mongolian and there are usually many nomadic families in the immediate area.

Day 05 To Uushig

Our ride now continues across the steppe. We ride to the uninhabited area of Uushig, where there is a small spring and some spectacular rock formations, and where it is even more likely to spot argali sheep. Our campsite has the rocks as a backdrop which potentially become "Flaming Cliffs" at sunset.

Day 06 To Baga Zorgol Hairhan Uul

Continue riding east, passing a small Gobi lake, Hariin Nuur, with perhaps some interesting birds.



The distance is 25 km to the smaller – but still impressive – Baga Zorgol Hairhan Mountains and rock formations. The lakes act as “islands” for waterfowl flying across a “sea of grass”. Pitch camp here and scan the ridges of this spectacular rock wall for Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*).

Day 07 To Ikh Zorgol Hairhan Uul

The Gobi steppe in this area is quite variable since we ride through the transition zone of the Gobi, meaning there is true steppe, semi arid steppe, sand dunes and also giant rock formations. Today we will ride for 25-30 km across populated steppe and for the full day we can see the Zorgol Hairhan giant rock formations in the distance. They are several hundred meters high, and are the central feature in the middle of the steppe.

Day 08 Ikh Zorgol Hairhan Uul

We will spend two nights camping in this dramatic landscape and make a day trip around the area.

Day 09 To Arburd Sands

A full day ride, for 25-30km to Arburd Sands. Today we will pass several nomadic herder families. The human occupants of this open and vast landscape are perhaps the most interesting, since all families in the area are nomadic herdsmen. Overnight at Arburd Sands Ger Camp.

Day 10 Arburd Sands

The ride today is a short one, but it cuts through the Arburd Sands, a giant 20km long sand dune, which is a hideout for numerous wolves. We will be riding right through the Sahara-like landscape. Overnight at Arburd Sands Ger Camp.

Day 11 Bogd Uul National Park

Half-day drive back to Ulaanbaatar. At lunch-time we will break the journey near Zuunmod, and enter Bogd Khan Mountain, a forested mountain area due south of Ulaanbaatar. Here are the Manzhir monastery ruins and a good chance of seeing red deer (*Cervus elaphus*). The drive from Manzhir to Ulaanbaatar is thereafter only one hour. Check into the hotel.

Day 12 Departure

Transfer to the airport, railway station or your next Mongolian destination. We can recommend a stay at Jalman Meadows Ger Camp in the Khan Khentii Protected Area, which provides for a sharp contrast to the Gobi Steppes experience.

Practicalities: We emphasize the quality of human contacts and encounters with local people and respect for the horse and local equestrian traditions, from which many lessons can be learnt. To travel with Nomadic

Journeys means a shared adventure with horses and camel carts in the great outdoors, choosing the life of the nomad.

Transport: Mongolian families frequently move from one pasture to another using traditional wooden carts. These are hitched to the animals available in the region. Here we will use camels and/or horses.

Staff: A English-speaking Mongol guide will accompany the group at all times. A cook will follow, with an assistant. In addition, the services of the local herdsmen will be hired along with their animals. The horsemen will come from Batbadrakh's families. They follow a traditional life-style in the areas where we will be riding. When six riders or more, we also have a Mongolian doctor as part of crew.

Meals: The meals will be prepared by our cook. We pride ourselves in having cooks adept at western, vegetarian and Mongolian cooking on our trips. For breakfast we can usually buy fresh yogurt from the herdsmen in the local area.

Minimum riding ability: Competent rider. Fit and capable of riding at all paces confidently. Varying terrain, in the saddle for several hours on most days.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar:

USD 1980 per person (2/10 members)

Single room/tent/ger supplement:

USD 30 per night.

Additional night in Ulaanbaatar:

USD 108 per room.

Private trip supplement: **USD 400**

Includes: Leadership, breakfast every day, and all meals outside Ulaanbaatar. All overnights in hotels in shared double (2n), ger camps (2n) and tents (7n). Camping equipment and all local transport. Local medevac coverage.

Excludes: Drinks, laundry. Lunch and dinner in Ulaanbaatar. Air or train tickets in and out of Mongolia. Visa fee. Bring your own sleeping bag.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar: 2011

GSR01: 17Jun-28Jun (Fr-Tu)

GSR02: 11Jul-22Jul (Sa-Fr) Naadam

GSR03: 23Jul-03Aug (Sa-We)

GSR04: 06Aug-17Aug (Sa-We)

GSR05: 04Sep-15Sep (Su-Th)

Reversal of trip: Trips may be done in the reverse for operational reasons.

Naadam: There is a Naadam Festival extension possibility prior to GSR02, which makes for a possible trip length of 09 –22Jul. The price supplement is USD 520 per person in shared double.