



Hangai Mountains Trek

~Pack-yaks supported

This trek will take us through the central Mongolian Hangai region. Our first destination is the Tövkhön Hermitage, a small monastery and lively pilgrimage site perched high on a cliff in roadless, densely forested surroundings. To the southeast, further up the valley, we enter the Khuisiin Naiman Nuur Nature Reserve that has recently been integrated into the Hangai Mountains National Park. It is a pristine and wild area, shaped by volcanic activity, with sub alpine mountain meadows and coniferous forests of Siberian Pine and Larch. Naiman Nuur translates to "Eight lakes" but actually the number of lakes is usually nine! The starting point for our trek will be the Orkhon valley, appointed a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscape in 2004. Since long before the Mongols this valley has been the centre of many ancient empires. When Genghis Khan ordered to have his capital city Karakorum built here in 1220 he merely followed a long tradition. We will visit Erdene Zuu Monastery built on the site of the old capital. All luggage and equipment for the trek will be loaded onto pack yaks, and local nomads will lead us on this journey into the heart of the Hangai Mountains. No support vehicle will follow in this rugged, roadless territory.

DAY 1: To Bulgan or Arkhangai

We pick you up from your hotel with a Russian 4wd minivan, complete with our guide, cook, equipment and provisions for the trip, and leave Ulaanbaater for the west. If you are interested in birds, there are three prime birding sites to choose for today's camp site, as we are staying in tents. The first birding stop is at Bayannuur in Bulgan province, where there are usually not only plenty of ducks, but possibly Relict Gull, White-naped Cranes or Swan Geese. If we do fine with time, we can drive until Ogiy Lake in Arhangai province, which has nice marshes on its western shore.

DAY 2: To Hotont

After breakfast we load up and drive further west a short way to the Tsagaan Sumiin Gol area in Hotont district, at the foot of the Hangai Mountains. Many herders occupy this area in the summer and we will be able to experience a first encounter with the hardy nomads of Mongolia. They live in gers (yurts) and usually keep horses, cows, yaks, goat and sheep for their livelihood.

DAY 3: To Tövkhön Hermitage on foot

Today we will spend most of the day hiking, entering Hangai Mountains National Park and the UNESCO appointed World Heritage Landscape on foot from the secluded northern side. We arrive at the remote Tövkhön Hermitage after a few hours of hiking upwards through the forested hills. The little monastery sits on top of a ridge at 2312 meters above sea level and we are rewarded with breathtaking views of the surrounding forested mountains. Women may not climb to the very top of the cliff, but the panoramic views from just below are almost equally great. Zanabazar (1635-1723), the first Buddhist leader and spiritual head of the Gelug lineage of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia, used the place as a retreat and there are several small caves where he meditated in total seclusion. Today Tövkhön is a lively pilgrimage site for local Buddhists. We hike the last 2½km to the road head, where we will meet our vehicle again and drive to Horgoi Hurem across the bridge spanning the Orkhon River, to the Upper Orkhon Valley, pitching our tents next to some nomads families.



DAY 4: To Huis Lake

Today the pack yaks are loaded by our hosts, native nomads of the area, who will lead us on this journey. We start our trek across the hills and ridges into the Naiman Nuur area. Our support vehicle will not be able to follow. At higher altitudes we catch spectacular panoramic views over this wild terrain. We set up our tented camp at Huis Lake for two nights.

DAY 5: To Shireet Lake

Today we hike through a valley, passing several lakes until we reach Shireet Lake, the biggest lake of Naiman Nuur. It has a narrow peninsula going into it. We catch scenic views of the forested hills along the way. The landscape is of volcanic origins here and extinct invisible volcanos are dotted in the landscape. In early summer lots of wildflowers grow on the meadows.

DAY 6: To Horgoi Hurem

Today, again the pack yaks are being loaded with all our luggage and provisions and we trek another route out of Naiman Nuur back into the upper Orkhon Valley. Again we can enjoy fantastic views. At the high altitude nomads raise mainly hardy yaks rather than cattle.

DAY 7: Horgoi Hurem

By now we have befriended the local nomads, who are our hosts. We will spend the day hiking in Horgoi Hurem area, which is quite populated with herder families during the summer.

DAY 8: To Högnö Khan Khan via Karakorum

In the morning we load up our vehicle and drive along the Orkhon River, which forms small canyons here. We stop at the scenic Ulaan Tsutgalan waterfall, popularly known as the Orkhon waterfall. Continuing our drive to the lower parts of the Orkhon River Valley we reach Harhorin, a small town, located at the site of Karakorum, the ancient capital of the Mongol empire. Here we visit Erdene Zuu Monastery, the first and one of the largest Buddhist monasteries established in Mongolia. It was founded in 1585 and for its construction, stones from the old capital Karakoum where used. The city had been completely destroyed 200 years earlier by the Ming Chinese army. Around Mid afternoon we drive for two more hours to the Högnö Khan Mountain Nature Reserve, where we will stay at a ger camp.

DAY 9: To Ulaanbaatar

In the morning we have the opportunity to visit the small Erdenekhamba Temple, and hike up a gully to the Övgön Monastery ruin. Högnö Khan has an amazing history and its giant rock formations are part of the Mongolian granite belt. After lunch at the camp, we drive back to Ulaanbaatar and drop you off at your hotel.

Practicalities

Transport: On this tour, apart from the short drive to the starting point of our trek and back to the city we will not rely on any motor vehicle support. Instead we utilize traditional wooden carts, that Mongolian families occasionally still use, when moving from one pasture to another. Here we will travel by pack yaks and horses.

Accommodation: Very spacious Scandinavian style Tepees in double occupancy. Please bring your own sleeping bag. The showers and toilets are in traditional Mongolian tents. For one night we stay at a ger camp. We trek in style!

Staff: An English speaking Mongolian guide will accompany the group at all times. There will also be a cook. In addition, the services of local herdsmen will be employed. They provide the horses, yaks and will accompany us on the trek.

Meals: Our cook will prepare the meals. We pride ourselves in having excellent cooks adept at both western and Mongolian cooking on our trips. There is no problem accommodating vegetarians on our trips. We can usually buy fresh milk and yogurt from local herdsmen.

Riding Horses: This tour doubles very well as horse riding trip. There will be an opportunity for experienced riders at the time of booking to order a saddled riding horse, with a horse-man to follow.

Trip Extension: Hustai National Park is located en route to the west, so you may also add some time there to see the Przewalski horses. We also offer fixed dated treks supported by camel carts in the East Gobi. At Ikh Nart Nature Reserve you can experience fascinating desert landscapes, offering a stark contrast to Naiman Nuur and the Hangai mountains.

Additional: We can reserve hotels and transfers in Ulaanbaatar for you. Please make sure to arrive in Ulaanbaatar the day prior to departure. We may operate the trek in reverse direction. Naiman Nuur, despite being a valley, is at a rather high elevation and it can snow any time of the year. Be sure to bring some warm layers of clothes.

Includes: Guide and all meals outside Ulaanbaatar. Camping equipment and all local transport. All entrance fees.

Excludes: Drinks, transfers and accommodation in Ulaanbaatar. Air or train tickets in and out of Mongolia. Visa fee.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar

Daily mid May to mid of September.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar: 2 - 6 members: **USD 2750 per person**

Single Supplement (6n): **USD 600**

Rent of riding horse: **USD 240**

Children: 0-2 years free. 3-12 years 25-50%.

Group discounts available on request for 4 persons or more.