



Photo: Ana Nordenstahl



Photo: Andrea Pregnan



Photo: Ana Nordenstahl



Photo: Polar Quest

The Gobi Steppes - Arburd Sands

Surprisingly close to the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar one finds the northernmost reaches of the Gobi steppes; treeless grasslands stretching to the horizon and beyond. We will explore Arburd Sands, an area where the steppe, dotted with nomads' camps, slowly gives way to sand, culminating in a 20 km long sand dune. Close-by, Zorgol Hairkhan Mountain, a gigantic rock formation rising almost vertically out of the plains, is habitat to Argali Sheep (*Ovis ammon*) and sometimes Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*). It is a place of great natural beauty, fraught with history and legends. The Mongolian nomadic steppe culture is still intact here. All of the herdsmen lead a traditional way of life, raising herds of horses, cows, sheep, goats and camels. Nomadic Journeys has a low-impact, fully collapsible ger (yurt) camp here, owned and operated by a local family. They are famous horse trainers who regularly participate in the annual Naadam Games and also operate our Gobi Steppe Ride and Steppe Nomads Ride. Their herd of horses is large and offers an ample selection for both the amateur and the competent rider. There are no other ger camps anywhere nearby, as few tourists actually come here.

Day 1: To Arburd Sands

In the morning we pick you up at your hotel. We drive south across the treeless steppe for some two to three hours to Arburd Sands. We arrive at the camp before lunch. In the afternoon we visit some nomadic families in the vicinity of our camp.

Day 2: Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains

We drive 35 km across the steppe to the Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains, emerging almost vertically out of the middle of the steppe. En route we will find some secluded petroglyphs of extraordinary quality. We will explore the area and perhaps have a chance to spot the rare and elusive Argali Sheep, the largest wild mountain sheep in the world. There is also a chance to see Siberian Ibex on the ridges, though we need some luck to see them. Zorgol Hairkhan is a sacred mountain, already mentioned in the Secret History of the Mongols, the oldest surviving literary work in Mongolian language. There are many traces of holy sites here, such as caves and springs, where local people make offerings.



Day 3: Arburd Sands

Today we explore the immediate surroundings of Arburd Sands. We may hike or use camels or horses to ride through the middle of the sand dunes which extend for 20 km. Strangely enough, a good number of Wolves - being wary of man - have taken refuge in the sand dunes and can sometimes be seen. We will most likely meet some herdsman and will no doubt be invited into their gers and learn about their ancient lifestyle.

Day 4: To Ulaanbaatar

After breakfast we drive back to Ulaanbaatar. Check into your hotel and explore the city on your own. Distances are short and nearly all points of interest can be reached by foot.

Low Impact Ger Camp

Nomadic Journeys is committed to the principles of Sustainable Tourism. We bring additional jobs to the area, that are based on traditional livelihoods. These involve the provision of yak carts, pack horses, riding horses and labor. The camp purchases milk and yoghurt from the nearby herders. There is a maximum capacity for 30 guests in double occupancy gers. Vehicles are parked a short walk away from the gers. The entire camp is fully collapsible and does not have shower or WC blocks. The toilets are long drop style allowing for natural decomposition. Showers are housed in a small gers, water is heated on a wood burning stove. All trash is separated. Solar panels and windmills generate some electricity for refrigerator and kitchen use. The camp can be relocated leaving no more impact on the area than a herding family would. Arburd Sands Ger Camp is indeed a fully collapsible hotel.

Practicalities

Transport: This tour is supported by a private jeep or minibus (depending on the number of travelers) to and from Arburd Sands Ger Camp.

Staff: An English speaking Mongolian guide will accompany you at all times. The camp staff consists of an English speaking camp manager, a cook and several local employees. Additionally the services of local herdsman can be employed to provide riding horses or transport animals.

Meals: Meals are served in the restaurant ger three times per day. Breakfasts are buffet style. Lunches and dinners consist of 2-3 course set meals. In the restaurant ger you will find a good selection of wines. Tea and coffee are available all day long. If you go on day hikes or excursions our cooks will prepare packed lunches for you.

Additional: We can organize hotel accommodation, city tours and transfers in Ulaanbaatar.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar

2 - 12 members: **USD 900 per person**

Single supplement (3n): **USD 210**

Additional night: **USD 220**

Children: 0-2 years free. 3-12 years 25-50%.
Group discounts available on request for 4 persons or more.

Includes: All meals outside Ulaanbaatar. All overnights in double occupancy gers. All local transfers. All activities in the camp.

Excludes: Transfers and accommodation in Ulaanbaatar.

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar:

Daily mid May to end of September.

