



Photos: Haroldo Castro

Ulaanbaatar Naadam Games

These ancient medieval games have survived and are celebrated throughout Mongolia before mid-July. In 2010 the Naadam Games have been inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The National Naadam is held in and near the capital on July 11th and 12th, commemorating the 1921 revolution. After an elaborate introduction ceremony in the National stadium, featuring dancers, athletes, horse riders, and musicians, the competitions begin, called "Eriin gurvan naadam" - three manly games. The featured disciplines are wrestling, horse races and archery. These were essential skills, required and practiced during the medieval times of Genghis Khan's armies, and perhaps as far back as the time of the Huns. Herdsmen arrive on horseback from distant provinces, simultaneously training their horses on the way. Some such journeys last up to three months! A giant nomadic camp is set up on the steppes outside Ulaanbaatar during the night of July 9th, where the horse races will be held.

This brief trip offers a close encounter with the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar and its immediate surroundings during bustling Naadam times. The itinerary should be understood as provisional to accommodate any changes in the programming. It is a time everyone wants to be there, including VIPs and official guests invited by the Mongolian government, therefore accommodation and transport are in short supply. Overbooking of hotels is likely, but at Nomadic Journeys we have many years' experience with organizing Naadam trips. We know how to anticipate.

Saturday 9th Ulaanbaatar

You may arrive in the Mongolian capital by flight or join this program from any of our other trips. If you arrive today we provide transfer to your hotel. You may explore the city on your own for the rest of the day. Distances are short and nearly all points of interest can be reached by foot. Minor archery competitions and trainings will already start today. Especially special events such as children's archery, Buryat style archery, etc. Training sessions allow for good photography. In the evening the horse trainers arrive with their horses and pitch their mobile camps at Hui Doloon Hudag, a steppe area 40 km away from the city center. In the evening we meet for a festive welcome dinner.

Sunday 10th Ulaanbaatar

Today, one day before the National Naadam officially begins, we will drive out of the city and attend smaller, more intimate "country-style" Naadam festivals, usually held in three communities some 50-60km away. This failing, the big horse races also start on the Hui Doloon Hudag plains today. In the countryside you have the chance to get up close to the horse races, and also to the wrestling matches. Local people usually wear their finest traditional dresses, adding to the colorful, festive atmosphere. We have a picnic lunch nearby and head back to Ulaanbaatar in the afternoon.



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Monday 11th Ulaanbaatar

Today Naadam is officially opened by the President of Mongolia. Soldiers on horseback, dressed in warrior regalia, ceremonially bring Genghis Khan's nine white horsetail banners from the parliament, where they are normally displayed, to the stadium. We will attend the impressive opening ceremony, after which the first round of wrestling will immediately follow. In most years 512 wrestlers from all over Mongolia compete, but in some years there are 1024! There are no judges, no time limits and no weight limits. We may try and attend the archery competitions (if not done the previous day) and later make our way out to the steppe area on the fringes of the city, where the horse races take place. We visit the nomadic tented camps that have sprung up, and experience a concentrated version of nomadic Mongolia. Herdsmen have come with their horses and all provisions for the festivities, which of course include airag (koumiss; fermented mares milk) for the merry making. Stroll around the area and you are likely to be invited in somewhere. You may also try your luck at the finals of the horse races, but prior instructions are necessary, since the finishing line of a full horse race of several hundred, is a potentially hazardous environment.

Tuesday 12th Ulaanbaatar

Our services end after breakfast (and transfer to the airport if applicable), as we have covered all aspects and the highlights of Naadam by now. You may of course remain in the city to attend the final rounds of wrestling and the awards, or continue for one of our trips further into the great Mongolian void. You need to be attentive with hotel reservations and advise us early if intending to stay beyond mid-day.

PRICE ex Ulaanbaatar:

2d/2n: **USD 1000 per person**

3d/3n: **USD 1100 per person**

Single Supplement (3n): **USD 270**

Practicalities

Includes: English speaking guide. All meals. All local transport and transfers. Three or four star hotel in shared double. Accommodation can not be specified until a few weeks prior to arrival.

Excludes: Air or train tickets in and out Mongolia.

Trip Extensions: Prior to and after this tour we have a series of trips into the vast Mongolian countryside. These are a Camel Trek in the Eastern Gobi and horse riding expeditions such as Mongol Horse Trails, Gobi Steppe Ride and Big Skies Trail.

Trips available in conjunction with Naadam:

- MONGOL HORSE TRAILS
- GOBI STEPPE RIDE
- BIG SKIES TRAIL
- YAK TREK IN THE KHAN KHENTII
- CAMEL TREK IN EAST GOBI
- IKH NART NATURE RESERVE
- ARBURD SANDS
- JALMAN MEADOWS

DATES ex Ulaanbaatar:

09 July - 12 July 2024.

