



## **MONGOLIA: LAND OF THE BLUE SKY**

**MAY 28–June 8, 2018**

ONE OF THE MOST SPARSELY POPULATED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD, MONGOLIA still retains its natural beauty of diverse landscapes and habitats relatively intact along with its well-preserved unique nomadic culture. The open countryside of Mongolia is awe-inspiring, and all sense of urgency seems to dissipate into the famous Mongolian blue sky.

Featuring one of Mongolia's magnificent natural wonders, the Gobi Desert, and the historical highlight Kharakhorum, this trip offers a special opportunity to travel back in time to the untouched land of Genghis Khan and hospitable nomads. Discover the incredible scenery, diverse wildlife, ancient history, and traditional culture of Mongolia on this adventure-packed journey.

**GROUP SIZE:** Limited to 15 travelers

**PRICING:** To be announced

**STUDY LEADER:** **Mark Van Baalen** has served Harvard University in a variety of roles since 1962. He received his AB in Astronomy in 1966. While an undergraduate he worked on the NASA-funded OSO-D satellite that flew in 1967 and obtained the first successful ultraviolet images of the Sun from orbit. Later, he turned his attention to the Earth sciences, receiving his AM and PhD in geology.

Since 1995 he has been a lecturer and associate in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences. During that time he taught popular courses in physical and environmental geology, and acted as mentor to many undergraduates. More recently he has studied the interactions between human activities and the inexorable process of climate change. In addition to these strictly scientific interests, Mark has a deep interest in history, including the exploration of remote regions of the world.

Mark and his wife Louisa, recently retired from the Kennedy School of Government, have been privileged to lead numerous Harvard excursions to distant lands. On this program Mark's lecture topics will include the future of the world's deserts, natural resources and the mining of strategic minerals, and invasion routes through the centuries.

## SCHEDULE BY DAY

*B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner, R=Reception*

### MONDAY, MAY 28

#### ARRIVE ULAANBAATAR

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar and transfer to your hotel.

Overnight: *Shangri-La Hotel* / (meals aloft)

### TUESDAY, MAY 29

#### ULAANBAATAR

Begin the day with a visit to Gandan Monastery, the seat of Buddhism in Mongolia and home of the Arts School of the Mongolian Buddhist University.

Next, visit the National History Museum for an excellent overview of Mongolia's history and culture, and peruse the Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum, named in honor of the Mongolian leader and artist from the 17th century.

After lunch, meet with a senior U.S. Embassy official for a brief introduction to Mongolia's current political affairs and the U.S.-Mongolia relations.

Enjoy your welcome dinner at a fine local restaurant.

Overnight: *Shangri-La Hotel* / (B, L, D)

### WEDNESDAY, MAY 30

#### HUSTAIN NURUU / HOGNO KHAN

Drive to Hustain Nuruu National Park (2 hours), home to the last remaining species of wild horse, the *takhi*—commonly known as Przewalski's horse. Twenty-five years after becoming extinct in the wild, the *takhi* was reintroduced to the Mongolian steppe in the 1990s.

Next, drive to the Hognu Khan Mountains (2 hours), located at the stunning confluence of three geographical zones (steppe, desert, and forest).

If time allows, there will also be the opportunity to visit a nomadic horse-breeder family and experience the warm hospitality

offered to passing travelers in the form of food, shelter and friendship. Relatively unchanged for centuries, Mongolia has one of the last remaining horse-based cultures in the world.

Overnight: *Local Ger Camp* / (B, L, D)

### THURSDAY, MAY 31

#### KHARAKHORUM

Continue driving to Kharakhorum (4 hours), a site of the 13th-century capital of the Mongol Empire. Chinggis Khan's son, Ogodei, created the city of Kharakhorum to serve as the empire's capital, but abandoned it 40 years later and moved the capital to Khanbalik, in what is now Beijing. On arrival, visit the Erdene Zuu Monastery. Kharakhorum was destroyed in 1388, but traces of this once-magnificent city still exist at Erdene Zuu, Mongolia's largest monastery, which was reputedly built from its ruins in the 16th century. Surrounded by 108 stupas, Erdene Zuu has been a place of Buddhist activity for centuries. Explore the monastery grounds and observe the monks as they perform their daily prayers and rituals in temples decorated with spectacular Buddhist art.

In the late afternoon, there will an opportunity to hike or ride horses.

Overnight: *Local Ger Camp* / (B, L, D)

### FRIDAY, JUNE 1

#### SHANKH, KULTEGEN, KHAR BALGAS

Begin the day with a visit to Shankh Hiid, a monastery that was once frequented by Zanabazar, the influential Buddhist artist. After lunch, visit Khoshoo Tsaidam to see the monuments of Turkik King Bilge and his brother General Kultegen (AD 685–731). Then drive across the Orkhon River towards the Khar Balgas ruins, a part of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape UNESCO World Heritage site.

Overnight: *Local Ger Camp* / (B, L, D)

## **SATURDAY, JUNE 2**

### **ONGIIN MONASTERY**

Drive to Ongiin Hiid and explore the ruins of this 17th-century temple. En route pay a visit to a local nomadic family and photograph their daily life including making of dairy products, daily chores of tending animals and work around the ger.

Continue your drive to Ongiin Hiid. Still known as the “Pearl of the Great Desert,” Ongiin Hiid was one of the largest monasteries in Mongolia until its destruction during the communist purges in 1939.

Overnight: *Local Ger Camp* / (B, L, D)

## **SUNDAY, JUNE 3**

### **HONGORYN ELS SAND DUNES**

Today we continue the drive to South Gobi (approximately 6 – 7 hours). For the next three days, explore the stunning landscape of the Gobi, habitat for Bactrian camels, Argali mountain sheep, goitered gazelle, golden eagles, saker falcons, jerboas– similar to kangaroo rats–and many endemic reptiles. Continue to the towering dunes of Hongoryn Els, which run 60 miles alongside the Gobi Altai Mountain range. Reaching upwards of 600 feet, these are the most magnificent sand dunes in the Gobi.

Overnight: *Ger Camp* / (B, L, D)

## **MONDAY, JUNE 4**

### **HONGORYN ELS / THREE CAMEL LODGE**

In the morning explore the dunes known as the “Singing Sands” for the remarkable low-pitched groan that is emitted when the surface is disturbed by wind. Those who are interested will have the opportunity to visit a camel-herding family and explore the area on the back of a Bactrian camel. On the way to the Three Camel Lodge, stop at the local Bulgan temple.

Overnight: *Three Camel Lodge* / (B, L, D)

## **TUESDAY, JUNE 5**

### **YOL VALLEY NATIONAL PARK**

Explore Yol Valley National Park. A hike through the valley allows you to discover the habitat of indigenous vulture-like lammergeiers, Altai snowcocks, ibex, yaks, and Argali mountain sheep.

Overnight: *Three Camel Lodge* / (B, L, D)

## **WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6**

### **HAVTSGAIT VALLEY / FLAMING CLIFFS**

In the morning drive to the Havtsgait Valley, site of ancient rock drawings left by early Gobi settlers. Visit the legendary Flaming Cliffs where in 1922, Roy Chapman Andrews found the first nest of dinosaur eggs the world had ever seen.

Overnight: *Maribela Hotel* / (B, L, D)

## **THURSDAY, JUNE 7**

### **ULAANBAATAR**

Fly to Ulaanbaatar in the morning. Upon arrival, meet with a well-known Mongolian Politician for an insight in to Mongolia’s current economic situation.

In the afternoon meet with a representative of the Oyu Tolgoi mining project. The project manages the world’s largest untapped reserves of gold and copper and is expected to help make Mongolia one of the fastest-growing nations in the world.

In the evening enjoy a performance featuring traditional Mongolian dancers and khoomi throat singers.

Overnight: *Shangri-La Hotel* / (B, L, D)

## **FRIDAY, JUNE 8**

### **DEPARTURE**

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for return flights (B)