

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



MONGOLIA: LAND OF THE BLUE SKY

JUNE 15–27, 2024

DETAILED ITINERARY

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.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

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

SATURDAY, JUNE 15 DEPART HOME

Depart on overnight flight to Ulaanbaatar.

SUNDAY, JUNE 16 ARRIVE ULAANBAATAR

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar and transfer to your hotel.

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

MONDAY, JUNE 17 ULAANBAATAR

Strolling past the Sukhbaatar Square, arrive at the National History Museum for an excellent overview of Mongolia's history and culture.

After lunch, visit the Chinggis Khan Museum, Mongolia's newest and largest museum. The nine-story museum showcases over 10,000 cultural exhibits revealing 2000 years of history linked to Mongolia's Great Khans, nobles, nomads, and their statehood from the

Xiongnu Empire to the end of the 20th century.

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

Enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

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

TUESDAY, JUNE 18 HUSTAIN NURUU / KHARAKHORUM

This morning 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.

Learn about current conservation efforts and the status of the herds found within the reserve at the visitor's center before trying to spot the horses in their natural habitat.

After lunch at a local camp continue 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.

Overnight: *Silk Road Ger Camp Deluxe Ger* (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19 KHARAKHORUM

Begin the morning with a visit to Kharakhorum museum. Founded to showcase the research findings from the ancient capital of Mongolia by the Mongolian and German joint archaeological expedition, the newly established museum offers insight into what was once the center of arts, politics, trades, and religions of the world.

Next, 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.

Return to your camp for lunch and spend the late afternoon walking through the grasslands of the Orkhon Valley, considered to be the cradle of Mongolian civilization.

Overnight: *Silk Road Ger Camp Deluxe Ger* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, JUNE 20 KULTEGEN, KHAR BALGAS

Begin the day with a visit to Khoshoo Tsaidam to see the monuments of Turkik King Bilge and his brother General Kultegen (AD 685–731). After lunch, at the ger camp, drive across the Orkhon River towards the Khar Balgas ruins, a part of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape UNESCO World Heritage site.

Overnight: *Silk Road Ger Camp Deluxe Ger* (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, JUNE 21 ONGIIN MONASTERY

Drive to Ongiin Hiid (4 hours) 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: *Secret of Ongiin Camp Standard Ger* (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, JUNE 22 THREE CAMEL LODGE

Today continue the drive to South Gobi (approximately 4 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.

After breakfast drive to Nomadic Expeditions' Three Camel Lodge ger camp, located at Bulagtai Mountain on the edge of Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park. Spend the rest of the evening at leisure or explore the surroundings on your own. The lodge offers a wide variety of activities to travelers from reading a book on Mongolia to watching a documentary about nomadic culture, and from learning traditional Mongolian games to enjoying a relaxing massage.

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

SUNDAY, JUNE 23 MOLTSOG SAND DUNES

Your day begins with a 45-minute drive to Moltsoq Els—one of the few regions of the Gobi covered by the sand dunes. On site visit the local camel herder family. The sand dunes extend to about 55 square miles with dunes peaking up to 50 feet. Moltsoq Els lies on the south side of the Yamaat Mountain and as the

northern wind pick up heading south, sand is blown down to its direction creating peaks around the area. Explore the dunes on foot,

In the afternoon, drive into the Western Wonder and visit Bulgan temple.

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

MONDAY, JUNE 24 YOL VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

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

Later, visit the local natural history museum for an overview of the flora and fauna of the surrounding area.

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

TUESDAY, JUNE 25 HAVTSGAIT VALLEY / FLAMING CLIFFS

This 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: *Three Camel Lodge Deluxe Ger* (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26 ULAANBAATAR

Fly to Ulaanbaatar this morning. Upon arrival, meet with a well-known Mongolian politician for an insight into 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 followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

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

THURSDAY, JUNE 27 DEPARTURE

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