



GOBI EXPLORER TOUR – MONGOLIA

TOUR OVERVIEW

July 1600 USD

7-night tour in Mongolia

SUMMARY

A short adventure for those who wish to see the great Gobi Desert in a short space of time.

During this short but intensive tour, we delve deep into the Gobi Desert and become true explorers. Our first stop is at Mandalagovi. This desert town was once home to factories during the Soviet Union period.

Heading further south, we will check out the Yol Am Valley. This is located in the Gurvan Saikhan Mountain range. Before setting off on our hike, we will pay a visit to the small local natural history museum which includes strange exhibits and ten million-year-old dinosaur eggs.

During this Gobi Desert tour, we also visit the Khongor Sand Dunes, also known as the 'Singing Dunes' for the eerie noise they make when swept by the wind and visiting Bayanzag. This is otherwise known as 'Flaming Cliffs' due to the rich red colouration of the clays and rocks which have been pushed up to form this landscape.

All this, whilst checking out the herds of camels as we go, hiking through untouched and unexplored areas, enjoying breathtaking sunrises, and experiencing life in a Mongolian tent/ Mongolia Ger.

Alternatively, it can be added to the 'Beyond the Steppes Tour' for an even bigger adventure.

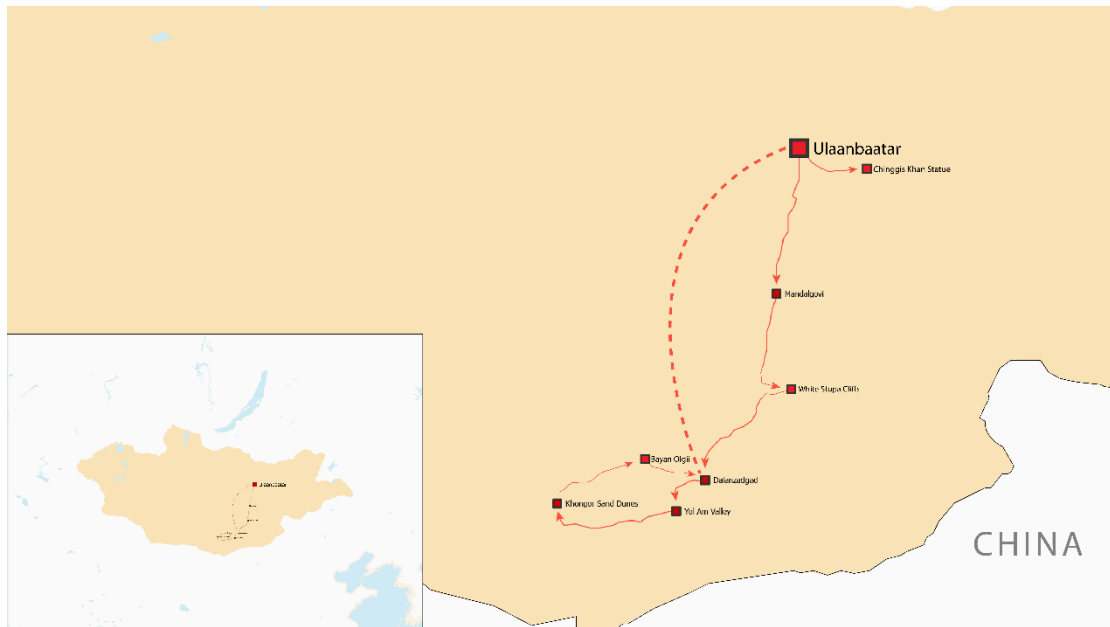
SAFETY

At Koryo Tours, our main priority (besides tour enjoyment) is your and the group's safety. Since 2012 we have worked with a local travel agency who help us ensure that the journey is safe in terms of vehicles we use and the areas we visit. You are entering the country as a legal tourist and must obey the local laws and customs. One of our experienced Koryo Tours guides will accompany the trip.

WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

Many passengers visit Mongolia every year, but many only scratch the surface by stopping while on the Trans-Siberian train journey for 3 or 4 days. At Koryo, we will help broaden this experience by taking you further, and off of the central tourist route, to gain a better experience and understanding of this truly unique country. With visits to Mongolians, Kazakh eagle hunters, Shamans, Tuvan's, the Naadam festival and glaciers, you will not be disappointed.

MAP & OVERVIEW



DAY 1	Arrival in Ulaanbaatar
DAY 2	Fly to Bayan Olgii. Drive to Khar Us Lake
DAY 3	Drive to Khurgan & Khoton Lakes
DAY 4	Khoton Lake
DAY 5	Drive to Shiveet Khairkan.
DAY 6	Hike (or ride) to Tavan Bogd
DAY 7	Drive to Tsengle
DAY 8	Return to Bayan Olgii
DAY 9	Drive to Tolbo Lake
DAY 10	Drive to Hovd
DAY 11	Nadaam Festival
DAY 12	Fly to Ulaanbaatar
DAY 13	Departure Day



DAILY ITINERARY

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar (DAY 1)

No matter your arrival time, as with all our tours, the Absolute Nomads representative will be there to meet you and escort you to your hotel.

Once you've had a chance to relax, we'll head out into the city for a bit of light exploration before heading to our first group meal.

Meals | Dinner

Overnight | Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar. A local hotel situated in the heart of Ulaanbaatar, within 5 minutes walk from the main square. This hotel offers a great location from which to walk out and explore the city.

Into the Gobi Desert (DAY 2)

We'll start our adventure early as we have a long drive south towards the Gobi Desert. On the journey, we will see the lush green rolling hills of Ulaanbaatar open up to the semi-arid middle Gobi region.

For lunch, we will stop at a local restaurant in the regional capital, Mandalagovi. This desert town expanded and grew during the Soviet Union period becoming a centre of manufacturing and industry, which unfortunately declined following the collapse of the Union. These days the town is home to a large agricultural college with farming also providing the primary income regionally.

Continuing our drive southwards, we will see more signs of desertification and herds of camels roaming the desolate desert plains.

We'll cross from the middle Gobi region into the south, turning off the main highway and heading out across the desert scrub to our destination, the White Stupa Cliffs (Tsagaan Suvarga). The White Stupa Cliffs are located in the rocky Tsagaan Suvarga National Park; they are an impressive geological rock formation. Millions of years of wind, rain, and tectonic shifts have sculpted this ancient sea bed. The cliffs that have been formed, as the name suggests, resemble crumbling white Buddhist pagodas (stand even further back, and they look like a deserted city).

Not far from the fantastic White Stupa Cliffs, we find our ger camp accommodation tonight, out in the desert; once we have checked in, you'll be able to enjoy a welcome drink and view your first Gobi sunset.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Tourist Ger Camp. We stay in gers out in this desert region. We have access to the restaurant area as well as bathroom facilities with hot showers and western-style toilets.

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An adventure in Eagle valley (DAY 3)

For those who watched the sunset the previous day, you may wish to complete the set and wake for the desert sunrise; alternatively, snuggle up in your duvet and enjoy the warmth of your ger.

After breakfast, we'll depart the camp and continue southwards to the city of Dalanzadgad. Dalanzadgad is the regional capital at the heart of South Gobi Province and the region where we will be spending much of the following days.

Dalanzadgad has a population of around 70,000, although it never feels like it since this settlement in the desert always appears empty with a wild west frontier feel to it. We'll stop for a spot of lunch and stock up on road snacks before driving on to our main highlight of the day Yol Am Valley.

A relatively short drive from Dalanzadgad finds us at the famed Yol Am Valley (Vulture Valley); this narrow canyon is located in southern Mongolia's Gurvan Saikhan Mountain Range. Before beginning our hike, we will visit the small local natural history museum; this quirky museum is quite interesting as it houses some of the region's paleontological finds in the shape of ten million-year-old dinosaur eggs.

We begin our adventure at the valley's wide entrance, following the small river into the canyons, narrowing cliffs eventually. As the step-sided walls cut the sun from the canyon's bottom, we will catch a glimpse of the locally famous frozen river. Over the winter months, the river builds up a thick layer of ice, which thaws slowly and, at times, remains long into the summer months. As you follow the winding path, eagles rise to circle in the thermals high above the canyon whilst wild goats can be seen perched on the high valley walls and picas scurry amongst the rocky terrain.

For those who may have used all of their energy climbing the dunes yesterday, there are plenty of horses for rent at the entrance of the canyon.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Tourist Ger Camp.



The Singing sand dunes of Khongoryn Els (DAY 4)

The adventure continues as we board our vehicles and journey onwards through the wilds of the Gobi Desert heading deeper into its sandy clutches to the Khongor Sand Dunes (Khongoryn Els), also known as the Singing Sands. We pass some of the typical Gobi terrain along the route, a mix of loose pebbles, gravel, and fine sand. As we journey, we will cross a fertile area of the steppe where we'll be sure to visit one of the traditional nomadic families who call this desolate region home.

The Khongor Sand Dunes, as the name suggests, are a dune system found within the Gobi; as only around 3% of the Gobi desert is covered in sand, the sight of these 300 metre high gigantic dunes is something to behold. The shifting sands of Khongoryn Els stretch out for over 180 km, although we arrive in the most impressive area and stay at a Ger camp with views across these giants.

Once we have eaten lunch and waited for the day to cool a little, we'll continue our adventure and visit one of Khongor's resident camel herder families. Although most of these herder families are now in this region to supply camels to tourists, we can think of no better way to approach these monstrous sandy giants. After arriving, we will have time enough to climb and explore the dunes; it may take a little longer than you think to climb the impressive dunes.

If you are fortunate, you may also experience why they have been named the singing dunes, as when the wind blows across the sand's surface in the right direction, an eerie sound is emitted, sounding like an aircraft to some and a hidden being to others.

Another day nearing its end, but as with much of the Gobi Desert's natural scenery, the Khongor Dunes come alive at sunset. Perhaps view the area from the top of the dunes or the comfort of our relaxing Ger camp while enjoying a cold drink after dinner.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Tourist Ger Camp



To the Flaming Cliffs (DAY 5)

The Gobi Desert is vast and our foray onto its plains today only gives us a snippet of its actual size; the Gobi Desert reaches into six Mongolian provinces (Aimags) and even crosses into China. The Gobi is the sixth-largest desert globally and the second in Asia. A wide-open place of extremes; our stop for today is perhaps one of the most well known.

Our main destination for today, Bayanzag – (the Flaming Cliffs), is stunningly beautiful with its flame-coloured sandstone cliffs and canyons. Aside from its obvious wow factor, Bayanzag is also where American paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews first discovered the world's first-ever fossilised dinosaur eggs and a mighty haul of various other fossils. A walk along the cliffs here is a walk in the footsteps of the man whom Indiana Jones was modelled on!

We will also take a walk amongst the lower regions of Bayanzag, nicknamed by some as Mongolia's answers to the Grand Canyon; they clearly haven't visited the canyon however since Bayanzag doesn't resemble the Grand Canyon but is truly a marvel in its own right. The lower areas of the cliffs offer us breathtaking views of the enflamed rock face and reflect the cliff's more local name, Bayanzag. Bayanzag translates to "rich in saxaul shrubs" which sounds a little odd until you find these peculiar spindly shrubs sprouting from the desert floor, creating a strange and otherworldly feel to the area.

Once we have finished our exploration, it's off to the nearby Ger camp where we can relax, drink, and maybe return to the cliffs to catch the changing colours as sunsets, making a perfect end to an exciting day.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Tourist Ger camp



A Nomadic drive (DAY 6)

For those early risers today, you may wish to view the changing colours of the flaming cliffs once again; this time, sunrise offers the opportunity and is said to be the best time, to see the true beauty of this famous geological formation. Following breakfast, we make our way across country, continuing our journey to an area known as Baga Gazriin Chuluu. The trip will take us across typical Gobi scrub, transitioning into the more famed and well-known traditional Mongolian steppe.

As we approach Baga Gazriin Chuluu, it comes as a real surprise a red granite outcrop of rocks rising to 1768 metres above sea level in the middle of the flat, featureless Mongolian steppe.

Baga Gazriin Chuluu is designated a national park home to 20 rare species of plant, ibex, marmot and mountain sheep. The area offers us impressive geology and the chance to explore this and more with some good hikes, which also encompass some of the ancient petroglyphs and burial mounds found in the area.

Should time permit on our journey, we will also have time to interact with a few more local nomadic herders who will also be passing through the region (just on a longer journey). Time permitting, we'll stop for the ubiquitous cup of milky tea before continuing on our own adventure.

Once at the ger camp, for those who wish, there may be the opportunity for some optional horse riding, a great location to experience a ride out on a true Mongolian steed.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Tourist Ger camp



Return to Ulaanbaatar (DAY 7)

After an early morning start, we say a fond farewell to Mongolia's southern region and drive back to the bustling capital Ulaanbaatar.

However, our tour isn't over as we're off into the city to explore some of Ulaanbaatar's must-see sites, the first stop Gandan Monastery.

Gandan Monastery is Ulaanbaatar's largest and most impressive Buddhist monastery; the complex is comprised of varying temples from different periods; one of the highlights is viewing the 26-meter-high gold-coated indoor Buddha.

From temple to museum, we'll head further into the city and stop at the National Museum of Mongolian History to see artefacts from Mongolia and Central Asia dating as far back as the Stone Age to the present day. From there, it's a short jaunt back across the square to the comfort of our hotel, where you'll have the chance to wash the Gobi sand from your hair before relaxing, shopping and prepare for our last group meal together.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Hotel in Ulaanbaatar.



Departure day (DAY 8)

We end our adventure in the morning, with transfers to the airport for international flights. Pack your souvenirs, your dirty clothes and your memories, and have a safe trip home!

ACCOMMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure from comfortable hotels in Ulaanbaatar to tourist ger camps in the Gobi Desert.

*All accommodation is based on a shared option.

Single supplement is 55 USD per person: This will guarantee you a single room option in our hotel stay and camping. Whilst in the ger camp you may still be sharing.

FOOD

Most meals are included in this tour although there is time allowed in Ulaanbaatar for your own exploration. Your tour guide will be able to advise on the options when you arrive.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Vegetarian food choices can be very limited once we leave Ulaanbaatar, although the chefs in the ger camps may be able to take special dietary requirements into account on the tour. If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure that you let us know in advance.

In this region the availability of certain specialized products for restricted diets, e.g. gluten-free or dairy-free is minimal or non-existent. As such we would strongly recommend you bring these dietary items if you need them.

TRANSPORT

All ground transport and domestic flights are included in this tour.

We use a mixture of vehicles: in Ulaanbaatar we will utilise larger private buses, and when we travel in the countryside, 4x4s are the vehicle of choice. Due to the nature of the adventure there will be long and sometimes bumpy drives. We will break these up where possible.

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VISAS

Many nationalities still require a visa for a visit to Mongolia. Please do not hesitate to contact your tour manager to see if this is the case.

The application process for a Mongolia visa is quite simple; you can apply for a visa yourself at your nearest Mongolian embassy. You will need to fill out an application form and submit one or two passport photos along with your passport. At times you may be required to provide proof of a tour booking with a Mongolian travel company. We can of course send this if required.

PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you are able to carry and lift your own luggage and walk with it for short distances.

Most travelers carry their luggage in a backpack or wheeled luggage, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags or backpacks with wheels are convenient. A lockable bag or small padlock is useful as your luggage may get stowed separately and unattended while out and about.

ESSENTIALS

- In addition to your 'normal' daily clothes, you will need the following essential items:
- Day pack — for carrying essentials when exploring destinations like water, camera, snacks, jacket, etc.
- Walking shoes or boots are essential
- Sun protection— hat, strong sunscreen, sunglasses, and lip balm.
- Mosquito repellent
- Rain jacket
- Soap and Shampoo
- Water bottle — we recommend a 1.5-liter capacity for which we can provide potable water. Bottled water is also available but we prefer to use safe drinking water rather than contribute to polluting the environment.
- Bedding, including blankets, will be provided at the camps although towels will be needed in some locations.
- One main piece of lockable baggage — Internal flights in Mongolia are subject to weight limits of 10kg (checked in luggage) + 5kg (hand luggage) and extra weight costs \$2/kg.



WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- 2 nights' hotel in Ulaanbaatar
- Transportation in Japanese 4x4s
- 5 nights Ger camps
- Entrance fees and National Park taxes
- All meals included
- English-speaking local guides
- Western Tour Leader

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flight
- Any alcoholic beverages
- Meals (specified)
- Medical insurance
- Visas (if needed)
- Items of personal nature

RECOMMENDED

- Personal medical kit — we recommend you carry items such as mild painkillers, electrolytes, Band-Aids and insect repellent.
- Spare batteries — our trips have access to power to recharge batteries for phones and cameras most days, but we recommend you take spare batteries for your camera.
- Electrical travel adapter plug.
- Money belt.
- Torch or flash light.
- Hand sanitizer.
- Neck pillow for those long, bumpy drives.

OPTIONAL

- A good book, a journal, and music player for longer drives.
- Walking poles if needed.

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VALUABLES

Please try to avoid bringing unnecessary valuables, and use your hotel safe. We strongly recommend that you photocopy all important documents e.g. air tickets, passport, vaccination certificates, etc. and keep the copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a photocopy makes it very much easier to obtain replacements if necessary.

CURRENCY

The official currency of Mongolia is the Tugreg. Mongolia is a mainly cash economy with most small businesses and shops unable to take credit card. Only change money at officially authorized currency exchanges; these are often found at banks, hotels and shopping malls. There are ATMs in Ulaanbaatar and other larger towns, but none in rural areas and they may not always accept foreign cards or have enough cash to dispense. US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency; other currencies such as Euros, UK sterling, Russian Rubles, and Chinese Renminbi can be exchanged in Ulaanbaatar.

TRAVELLING ON A GROUP TRIP

As you travel on a group trip, you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling together. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too.

We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group — patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a specific time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting.

We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well — this takes just a little effort on your part.

Due to privacy reasons, we are unable to provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travellers booked on your trip before departure.



IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTES

- As a responsible tour operator, your safety is our priority. Mongolia is a safe country to visit, but your tour leader and local guides will be able to advise you further about travel in this location.
- This tour is not suited for children under the age of 12 (please check with Tour Manager if you would like to bring a child on tour), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed) and camping in more remote locations.
- If you have a medical condition which may affect your health or safety during your trip, you must inform us before the visa application.
- After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails so you can keep in touch, swap photos etc. If you do not wish to be on this list, then please let us know.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

CANCELLATION If our partners cancel the tour, we will fully refund the tour price. Please note this tour is charged in US\$. If we receive any other currency, this will be converted to US\$ on that day's exchange rate fixed by the Bank of China. Any refund will be made according to the US\$ amount we received and not the original currency sent. With all refunds, Koryo Tours will not be held liable for any bank charges. We do have a deadline for cancellations although due to the nature of travel in Mongolia we may need to book certain services earlier such as flights and hotels. In many cases, these are none refundable. Your tour manager will let you know when this needs to be done. After this it would be impossible to offer a full refund should you then need to cancel.

STANDARD DISCLAIMER: Koryo Tours reserves the right to withdraw service and cancel a tour at any time. In this eventuality, a full refund of any monies paid by the customer will be made.

Koryo Tours cannot be held responsible for any mishap to yourself or your property and in particular any consequence or effects of flight/train cancellation/delay, robbery, sickness, government intervention or other such happenings.

INSURANCE Koryo Tours insist that tourists travelling on all of our tours have full medical insurance. You are advised to insure yourself against any possible risk that may occur and in particular to ensure that sufficient insurance has been obtained in respect of any dependent relatives. It is your responsibility to be covered by insurance which must include medical expenses and the cost of repatriation should you become too ill to continue.