



Riding the Gobi Desert

MONGOLIA

Head out on a **horseback trek across the Gobi Desert** and explore the vast, varied and hauntingly silent sand dunes, arid steppes and rocky mountains. Experience the life of a nomadic herdsman as you **ride in Mongolia** at high altitudes under clear-skies surrounded by a caravan of Bactrian camels. Travel with a local guide and interpreter and learn first-hand about this fascinating and unique area, as well as discovering its rich culture and equestrian traditions. Enjoy delicious Mongolian cuisine and trade with the nomadic families you meet along your way.

Pack Trip	13 days / 8 days riding -	From £0		Open to non-riders
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On horseback in the Gobi, Mongolia



The sand dunes of the Gobi desert seen from horseback



See the Gobi desert sand dunes on this trail riding holiday in Mongolia

ITINERARY

Highlights

- Discover a region often forgotten by tourists and experience riding with native Mongolians and meet some of the last nomadic herdsman on the planet
- Explore the varied Gobi landscape - immense arid steppes, sand dunes constantly in motion, serene lakes, and unexpected and vast granite mountains
- Ride with a caravan of Bactrian camels charged with pulling the equipment in traditional wooden carts
- Enjoy delicious Mongolian cuisine prepared by an accompanying chef, and experience desert trade as you have breakfasts of yoghurt brought from the nomadic herdsman you meet along your way
- Naadam extension possible for July departure

Day 1 — 1 : EUROPE - ULAANBAATAR

Fly out from Europe to Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia; most flights go via Istanbul or Moscow. This is an overnight flight departing today and arriving tomorrow, on Day 2.

Please note flights are not included but we can help with this upon request.

Day 2 — 2 : ULAANBAATAR

On your arrival at Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, you will check in to your hotel where you can unwind a little from your flight. In the evening, you will have your first taste of Mongolian cuisine, meet your Anglophone expedition guide and have a briefing as to how your trip will unfold.

For the special Naadam departures (normally in July), the initial 2 days spent in Ulaanbaatar will allow you to enjoy the exciting bustle and intrigue as the city prepares itself for the Naadam Festival.

Please note that the tour may occasionally be done in reverse for operational reasons.

Day 3 — 3 : ULAANBAATAR - TSEEL - 1 hour riding

Campsite

After breakfast, you will visit the Gandan Monastery, the centrepiece for the revival of Buddhist Lamaism in Mongolia. With luck you will catch the prayer times. Then drive south out of the city and enjoy a picnic lunch on the grasslands. Continue across the steppe to a remote location called Tseel. Your nomad hosts will meet the group there, with their horses and Bactrian camels. The area of Tseel has no or few nomads. Before the end of your first day, you will saddle up and go out for a short ride to start getting used to the Mongolian horses and riding style.

You will have a hearty Mongolian dinner in the mess yurt and then spend your first night sleeping out in the vast scrubland wilderness.

Day 4 — 4 : TSEEL - HOYD ONJUUL - 20km ride

Campsite

For your first ride, you head west to the mountains of Hoyd Ōnjuul. In the surrounding area it is usually possible to spot herds of Mongolian Gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*) also known as White-tailed Gazelle. With a little luck, you may even see the Black-tailed Goitred Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*) which is better adapted to arid environment indicating that you are riding in the transition zone of grasslands and desert steppes. In this mountainous area, you may be able to see Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) which Americans call Elk or Wapiti. Certainly Wolves (*Canis lupus*) are around but seldom seen.

You will spend the night in your tents out on the plains, and, as every night, the team will also set up a yurt for the herdsmen and your guide.

Day 5 — 5 : HOYD ONJUUL - SUMAN - 20-25km ride

Campsite

After having had a few days to get comfortable in the saddle, the day's ride is the perfect opportunity to enjoy your first gallops across the vast steppe - watching the plateau wilderness rush past. You will ride to Bayan Hills, where you may encounter high-altitude fauna such as the Siberian Ibex and the Argali sheep.

The immensity and solitude of the landscape, as well as the warmth and uncomplicated nature of your interaction with the Mongolian team will provide you with a true sense of what it's like to live and understand this country and culture. You will make your way to your camping ground where several nomadic families have also often set up their yurts for the night, due to the proximity of a water source.

Day 6 — 6 : ZORGOL HAIRKHAN - 20-25km ride

Campsite

Today you will turn the horses towards the east and ride to the mountains of Zorgol Hairkhan: a stark contrast with the flat steppe. It is a place steeped in history, and the Khan himself is said to have wintered here while in conflict with a competing leader. You should meet more nomads and livestock, as well as a breeding population of Cinereous vulture at Zorgol.

At the end of the afternoon, you will make your way back down to the yurts in Baruunbayan Valley where you will enjoy more traditional Mongolian cuisine and retire to your tent.

Day 7 — 7 : UUSHIG - BAGA ZORGOL HAIRHAN UUL - 25km ride

Campsite

You continue riding east. You will pass the small lake called Hariin Nuur, with the opportunity to spot more of the local birds, including waterfowl. You will cover approximately 25 km until you reach the Baga Zorgol Hairkhan Mountains. This region provides excellent pasture grounds, and many nomadic families will have decided to stop with their livestock there.

You will pitch camp in this beautiful environment and scan the ridges for Siberian Ibex and Lammergeiers (Bearded vulture).

Day 8 — 8 : IKH ZORGOL HAIRHAN UUL - 25-30km ride

Campsite

The region you will ride through today is quite variable in terms of terrain as it is considered the transition zone of the Gobi desert, meaning you will discover a true grassland steppe, a semi-arid steppe, sand dunes and also giant rock formations several hundred metres high.

With the giant Zorgol Hairhan rock formations always in sight, you will spend the afternoon riding across one of the inhabited steppes in this region of the desert.

The Mongolian people are known for their singing and, around your camp in the evening, your guides will sing traditional Mongolian songs for you - songs evoking the steppe, the horses, family and the clear Mongolian sky. It is truly an unforgettable experience to hear these songs sung with such passion and understanding from people native to this intriguing region.

Day 9 — 9 : IKH ZORGOL HAIRHAN UUL - 20km ride

 Campsite

A full day spent riding in this dramatic landscape surrounded by majestic mountains will offer you the chance to further explore this environment and the wildlife that calls it home.

You will spend the night in the same area as the night before and as you are setting up your camp at dusk, you may be able to hear the cries of the wolves that inhabit the plain and come out in the evening.

Day 10 — 10 : IKH ZORGOL HAIRHAN UUL - ARBURD SANDS - 25-30km ride

 Yurt camp Arburd Sands

You will spend a full day in the saddle riding towards Arburd Sands, that extend for about 20 kms. Tonight you will sleep at Arburd Sands Ger Camp; ger is the Mongolian word for yurt. This camp is dedicated to the creation of jobs and also the principles of eco-tourism.

During the day's ride, you will most likely pass several nomadic herder families. The people who call this open and vast landscape home are fascinating, almost all of the families in the area are nomadic herdsmen, and with your guides and interpreter you will maybe have the chance to meet them and learn about their way of life.

Day 11 — 11: ARBURD SANDS - 15-20km ride

 Yurt camp Arburd Sands

Your last day spent on horse back will be short, yet intense. Your route will take you through the Arburd Sands, an imposing 20km long sand dune, which is a hideout for the area's wolf population. This Sahara-like landscape will differ greatly from the environment of the days before and offer a unique riding experience.

In the evening, you will head back to your yurt at the Arburd Sands Ger Camp.

Day 12 — 12 : ARBURD SANDS - ULAANBAATAR

You will say goodbye to the horses and the team and be transferred to Ulaanbaatar (approx. 5 hour drive). There, you will get settled into your hotel and have a chance to explore the city a little and choose your own restaurant for the evening - sampling a different style of local cuisine.

Day 13 — 13 : ULAANBAATAR - EUROPE

In the morning, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home, usually via Moscow or Istanbul.

DATES & PRICES

We are currently updating our dates and prices they will be online soon. If you want details of this holiday, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Price details

No departure for this destination. Please contact our travel advisers for more information.

- International flights are not included but can be booked on request.

- Groups are made up of between 2-10 international riders and an English-speaking guide

- There is no single supplement if you are willing to share a room/tent with another guest of the same sex. To guarantee your own room/tent there is a single supplement of \$660/€650/£580

- For most citizenships, a visa is required to enter Mongolia and this is your responsibility.

- There is a 90 kg / 14.1 stone / 200 lbs rider weight limit on this trail.

NAADAM FESTIVAL EXTENSION

For the trip leaving in July, there is an extension for a further 2 days in order to experience the festival of Nadaam at Oulan Bator. A festival which includes horse racing, archery competitions and Mongolian fighting. Includes 2 additional nights and entry to the festival.

TRAVEL IN A PRIVATE GROUP

If you wish to travel as a couple or with a group of friends and wish to do so without other riders, you can pay a supplement of approx. \$400/€360/£330, per person, to privatise your experience. For groups of over 5 riders no supplement will be charged.

Please Note

The itinerary may be modified at anytime for security reasons, meteorological or events beyond our control such as blocked roads, rivers in flood, drought, strikes and local holidays. Equus Journeys, our local partners and their local guides will always strive to find the best solution and will alter the itinerary as needed.

The names of the hotels and accommodation are given for information only and depending on availability, they may be modified without notice and replaced by another of a similar standard.

Price includes

SUPPORT TEAM

2 local English-speaking interpreters: 1 guide and 1 camp manager
2 Mongolian herdsman in charge of the horses, camels and carts

LOGISTICS

1 horse equipped with saddle and bridle per rider
1 cook
Camels and carts for the transfer of tents and baggage

INLAND TRANSPORT

4x4 transfer to the Gobi desert
Return transfers to and from the airport at Ulaanbaatar (unless dates differ from those of the rest of the group) and all other transfers mentioned in the itinerary

ACCOMMODATION

3* hotel at Ulaanbaatar - price based on 2 to 3 people per room
2 nights in 2-3 person yurts equipped with camp beds
7 nights spent in 3-man tents (for 2 people sharing)

MEALS

Full board from lunch on day 3 to lunch on day 12
Bottled water had throughout the ride

EXTRAS

For groups of 4+ riders: Mongolian doctor on the ride
First aid kit

Price doesn't include

MEALS

Lunches in Ulaanbaatar are not included in the price (expect to spend around £8 per meal)
Beverages and personal extras

TRANSPORT

Visa fees
International flights that we can book for you upon request

EXTRAS

Small-group supplement for groups of between 2 and 4 riders

INSURANCE

Cancellation and travel insurance are not included in the above listed price. Please note that insurance is mandatory. We recommend taking out an insurance policy as soon as your trip is booked to cover you in case of cancellation

Optional

ACCOMMODATION

Additional night in Ulaanbaatar - please enquire
Supplementary charge for individual room, tent and yurt

EQUESTRIAN INFO

Horses

Horses of legend and victors in battle, the Mongolian horse is small, forward going, hardy and docile and is perfectly adapted to horse riding expeditions across all types of terrain. These horses have a rare gentleness and sociability and they represent no particular technical riding challenges. Certain horses are more lively than others, however, the team will select, with great care and attention, the horse with the temperament best suited to you and your riding style.

For this ride, there is a maximum rider weight of 90kg/ 14st 2lbs/198 lbs. If you weigh more than this and wish to ride, please contact us and we will advise on a case-by-case basis.

Guide & local team

Your guide for the expedition will be a local English speaker. The rest of the team is usually made up of a minimum of 2 local nomadic herdsmen who will ride with you throughout the length of your ride as well as a cook who will prepare delicious and hearty meals. The horsemen come from Batbadrakh families and they live in a style traditional to the areas in which you will be riding. When there are five or more riders in the group, a Mongolian doctor will also ride along.

Minimum riding ability

MINIMUM RIDING ABILITY

This trip is open to intermediate level or experienced riders who are comfortable riding outdoors across a variety of terrain.

There is a 90 kg / 14.1 stone / 200 lbs rider weight limit on this trail.

PACE

The pace of the ride will alternate between a walk and a trot with occasions for unforgettable gallops across the immense Mongolian plains.

As the baggage is transported by camel, this adds a flexibility of pace to the ride. Riders wishing to ride at a less brisk and sustained pace can ride alongside the caravan.

The horses will not provide any particular challenges, although certain are more energetic than others. You must pay close attention to how you use your saddlebags and change into your waterproofs - never getting dressed in the saddle, as the horses are not used to it and may be spooked.

TACKING ABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

Each horse is tacked and untacked by a member of the Mongolian team. Every rider is welcome to participate in the setting up of the camp if they wish (pitching and taking down the yurts).

TRIP CONDITIONS AND REQUESTED EXPERIENCE

You must have a good level of fitness to take part in this trip due to the long days in the saddle and the varied terrain you will be riding across; alternating between plateaus, mountain passes with slight ascents and through the desert. The temperature is agreeable at this time of year during the day (18° to 30°), but it can be cool at night - although frozen nights are rare in the Gobi. In general, the days will be sunny; however, you must be prepared for the possibility of storms which can make the temperature plummet suddenly.

This trip does not rely on any back up vehicle. Instead, your belongings are carried by camels pulling wooden carts, for a minimum impact on the environment and a real, authentic nomadic experience.

You must also be aware that you will be riding in an extremely isolated area of the country. The transfers at the beginning and end of the trip are completely 'off-road' and are often affected by underdeveloped Mongolian infrastructure.

Previous experience of a horse riding trip over several days is a plus; however, it is not obligatory. Riders who do not mount regularly should get riding fit before the trip's departure.

You must be ready and open to a different style of riding and to understand that Mongolians have a very different relationship with their horses than we do in the UK. Travelling to a country where you will encounter a completely different culture and mentality means agreeing to accept these differences and also to respect them.

Arriving for the ride in good physical condition is the first step in ensuring a respectful exchange with the local population: your well-being speaks volumes, and much like a smile, can break down barriers right from the word go!

EQUESTRIAN EQUIPMENT

For riders measuring over 1m 90 (6ft 2in) we recommend that you bring your own pair of adjustable stirrups as the local stirrups, while adjustable, are often limited in terms of length.

We recommend our riders to wear a helmet to the correct standard and you should bring your own to ensure a proper fit.

TRAVEL INFO

COMFORT

Throughout the ride, you will stay in 3-man tents, shared by 2 people, with camping mattresses. Each evening, a yurt will also be set up for the baggage and meal preparation. A WC tent is pitched every evening and a shower tent can be set up upon request. Cot, mattress and woollen blankets are provided but you should bring your own sleeping bag.

For the final 2 days of your ride, you will sleep in a 2-3 person yurt. Full bedding provided.

In Ulaanbaatar, you will stay in a 3* standard hotel in a double room with a private bathroom.

MEALS

The food is simple, hearty and is usually made up of fresh local produce prepared by a cook who travels with you and will adapt the recipes to a more western palate. Evening meals (soup, main, dessert) are usually served around small camping tables with stools. At midday, you will have picnic lunches. Often the team will buy a sheep at some point throughout the ride to provide fresh meat for your meals. For breakfast, you will usually have fresh yoghurt bought from the herdsmen in the area.

Vegetarian diets can be accommodated with advance notice.

Water:

Do not to drink water from unknown sources. The cook will boil water each day for you to fill up your water bottles but you should also bring water-purification tablets such as Micropur.

CLIMATE

Mongolia enjoys around 260 days of sun per year!! The majority of the country receives very little rainfall, a yearly average being around 200 - 350 mm in the north, an amount which decreases as you head further south. The country is located in the heart of a system of high pressure fronts (anticyclone) which means that the skies are often completely clear of clouds. In fact, there is only significant cloud cover during the summer which has led to the Mongolia sometimes being referred to as 'blue sky country'.

On the other hand, the country also plays host to a continental climate of extremes due to the country's geographical profile: vast semi-desert plateaus at an average altitude of over 1500 metres.

Winters are harsh and long (from October to April), with temperatures dropping to -30° or -40°C in January and February. In the Gobi desert, it is not unusual to see snowfall up until April, and certain lakes remain frozen up until June; you will start to see the first signs of winter at around the end of September.

Summers in Mongolia are marked by a short rainy season, from mid-July to September, characterised by rain spells that are light and brief and generally

take place at the end of the day. Temperatures are mild in the north of the country and extremely hot in the Gobi desert in the south. Due to the high altitude, the evenings are cool, even in the summer months.

Winds are often strong, especially during the short spring, where they also bring with them sand storms. On top of this, the changes in weather can be vast and sudden. The temperature differences between day and night are often significant; it is not unheard of, in spring and autumn, to pass from - 5°C at the beginning of the day to + 30°C at noon.

The country also experiences dzud or zud, a Mongolian term for a severe winter; a white dzud signals heavy snowfall which impedes access to the grazing pastures for the livestock and a black dzud means that a lack of snowfall and freezing temperatures create a drought and the livestock suffer from dehydration.

Depending on the region of Mongolia you are choosing to visit, the best time to travel there is between May and the end of September.

In the Gobi desert, in the south of the country, summers are scorching. Certain areas, in the extreme south, may receive no rainfall for several years at a time.

TIPS

Tipping is always welcome if you are happy with the services provided to you by the local guides and drivers. Any tip given should be in line with the cost of living in the country. For Mongolia, you could factor in a tip of around £30 - 40. Tipping remains completely at your discretion.

PACKING LIST

Head

- A riding helmet is compulsory and we recommend that you take your own to ensure a correct fit. Helmet makers (GPA, HKM, LAS Helmets, Lamicell, Troxel, Equithème) now offer horse-riding helmets that are ventilated, strong, light and comfortable.
- Sunhat for when not riding
- Sunglasses - with a cord attached so they don't fly off when riding
- Buff or bandana for protecting your neck and face from the sun, wind or rain
- Warm hat for cold evenings/days
- Waterproof hood or cagoul

Upper body

- Thermals in case of cold weather
- Long sleeved shirts provide protection from the sun or extra warmth
- Down jacket or gilet for cold evenings
- T-shirts
- Lightweight fleece or jumper
- Warm polar fleece or equivalent (plus a spare in case one gets wet)
- Waterproof jacket - rain can be difficult to predict and it's better to be prepared. In the mountains the weather can change quickly

Legs

- 2 pairs of lightweight, comfortable riding trousers or jodhpurs - we recommend riding in them at home before taking them on holiday to ensure they don't rub
- Waterproof over trousers
- Casual clothes for the evenings (jeans or walking trousers)
- Thermal trousers for cold days or for sleeping in
- A swimming costume may be useful for impromptu dips in the lake and washing in the river
- Non-irritant cotton or synthetic underwear

Hands and Feet

- Comfortable riding boots. We recommend short boots with half chaps but you may wish to take long chaps. We don't recommend taking your favourite long leather boots in case they get damaged
- One pair of waterproof shoes or boots (in case of rain and also for around the camp in the morning when the ground can often be damp)
- Lightweight shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Several pairs of warm socks
- Gloves - your hands are particularly exposed to the sun, wind or rain whilst riding

Horse riding extras

- Backpacks cannot be worn whilst riding. We recommend a small bumbag or a coat with pockets so that you can carry small items with you during the day (camera, sunscreen, lip balm etc)
- A soothing cream may be useful to treat areas irritated by long hours in the saddle
- Backpacks are not permitted whilst riding

- For riders measuring over 1m 90 (6ft 2in) we recommend that you bring your own pair of adjustable stirrups as the local stirrups, while adjustable, are often limited in terms of length

Night

- Sleeping bag with a comfort level of -5° min, even better one with a rating of -8° or -10°. We also recommend you bring with you a sleeping bag liner for extra warmth. Cots, mattresses and woollen blankets are provided.

Other useful items

- Water-purification tablets
- Water bottle (1.5 litres or 2 equivalent)
- Head torch or small torch for moving around at night - bring spare batteries and bulbs
- Toiletries
- Protein or cereal bars for the longer stretches of riding
- Toilet paper and a lighter to burn it after use
- Swiss army knife or equivalent (in checking-in luggage!!)
- Small plastic bags for your rubbish
- Ear plugs (may be useful)
- Camera and high capacity memory card. Spare battery
- A pair of binoculars

Medical kit

Make sure any allergies (to medication or otherwise) and clearly stated in your medical kit

- Any medication you regularly take
- Painkillers
- Imodium or similar anti-diarrhea medication
- Vitamin C tablets
- Sunscreen and lip balm - should be high factor
- Insect repellent
- Eye drops
- Hydrating/ soothing cream
- Plasters
- Blister plasters in case of any rubs
- Antiseptic cream, plasters, aspirin, anti-histamine, insect-bite salve etc..
- 10cm wide bandage
- Spare prescription glasses/contact lenses
- Re-hydration sachets
- Antiseptic wipes
- Hand wash gel

General information

- Throughout the ride, we ask you not to exceed 15kg of luggage per person so as not to over charge the yaks and logistics team responsible for carrying your luggage throughout the trip
- Travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes is highly recommended - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!
- We recommend taking a copy of your passport and insurance documents with you in case you lose your originals
- If, in wishing to 'travel light', you plan to wash your clothes throughout the trip, please ensure you bring biodegradable laundry products with which to do your washing
- Ensure you bring something for your chemical waste (batteries, aerosol cans, cream tubes, plastic wrapping), in order to take it back to the UK where recycling and waste disposal is done well and effectively. We advise to, wherever possible, avoid altogether bringing wrapped products to Mongolia. If you do, ensure you take them back to the UK with you

Equipment provided

- Medical kit
- 1 pair of medium saddlebags
- Yurt for 2 or 3 people with individual beds
- Cot, Mattress, woollen blankets
- Yurt mess tent
- Bathroom tent with a WC and a shower with hot water
- Bottled water

Suggestions

- We suggest taking with you some postcards of your hometown or photos of your family to show to your guides and team. You may also like to take out a

present/ token for your hosts, Mongolians enjoy playing UNO, with foam balls, skipping ropes, pencil crayons, colouring books for the children and sample tubes of different creams.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

1. **Travel light.** It's a little known fact, but the lighter you pack, the better for the environment as heavy bags will produce higher emissions (when flying a plane or driving a car!).
2. **Reduce plastic waste.** Take your favorite reusable bottle with you. Avoid single-use bags, cups, or straws.
3. **Preserve nature.** Always take your rubbish with you during the ride and recycle them. Leave all the flowers or plants as you found them, and never get too close when observing wildlife. Make sure to use eco-friendly products such as body wash or laundry detergent (if camping) to protect both your skin and the environment.
4. **Choose your experiences carefully.** Respect animal life by not participating in any activities that abuse wild animals (shows, elephant rides, etc.).
5. **Support local populations.** Buy local handicrafts, be respectful of customs, and learn about the culture of local communities.
6. **Share!** Raise awareness among your family and friends about sustainable tourism.

For more information please [see this page](#) .