BEST OF MONGOLIA & NAADAM FESTIVAL

Classic Tour | 17 Days | Physical Level 2

Ulaanbaatar - Naadam Festival - Terelj - Dalanzadgad - Khongoryn Els - Bayanzag - Ongii - Karakorum - Khustai National Park

Discover Mongolia's wide-open landscapes and rich traditions on this unforgettable journey. Travel from the grassy plains of the steppe to the vast Gobi Desert, staying in traditional ger camps along the way. Meet local nomadic families, explore ancient sites linked to Genghis Khan, and enjoy a mini Naadam festival. You'll also visit Khustai National Park, home to wild horses, and get a real sense of life in one of the world's most remote and beautiful places.

- Journey through the dunes, cliffs, and wide-open plains of the Gobi Desert
- Discover Bayanzag's 'Flaming Cliffs' where dinosaur fossils were first unearthed
- Walk around the iconic Turtle Rock in Terelj National Park
- Spot the famous Takhi horses grazing freely in Khustai National Park
- Spend two days at the annual Naadam Festival

TOUR MAP – JULY DEPARTURE

BEST OF MONGOLIA & NAADAM FESTIVAL TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

CLASSIC TOURS:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Mongolia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escort whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 2:

All of our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Best of Mongolia & Naadam Festival' is rated as a **physical level 2** tour. A moderate level of fitness is required. You will be on your feet for most of the day, with longer walks that include ascents and descents on steps or uneven paths. Travelling conditions may be more challenging in some areas.

Travelling in Mongolia is both rewarding and challenging because of the lack of basic infrastructure, such as roads or a transportation system. This tour covers a vast distance and reaching the sites involves travelling through areas of Mongolia which are barren, remote and without any modern facilities.

- There will be short periods of walking whilst sightseeing often on steep or uneven ground.
- There are periods of driving on rough unsealed roads or tracks. Expect long drives.
- Outside of Ulaanbaatar, your accommodation will be in ger camps. Whilst we use premium ger camps, facilities still may be more basic than what you're used to. The camp in Ongii Hiid has shared bathroom facilities.
- The walk through Yol Valley may be icy, depending on the time of year
- The Naadam Festival grounds have little to no seating, depending on the event.

Of course, our National Escorts will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances, we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 17 days in duration including overnight international flights in both directions as this is the most likely flight option from Australia.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only', join the tour on Day 2 in Ulaanbaatar and end the tour on Day 16 also in Ulaanbaatar. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1-2: Fly overnight to Ulaanbaatar Meals: D

Fly overnight to Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar. On arrival, you will be met in the arrival hall by a local guide from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes to your hotel in Ulaanbaatar.

Early check-in is not included. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.

Destination Information

Ulaanbaatar – Home to nearly half of Mongolia's population, Ulaanbaatar is the country's political, cultural and economic heart with centuries-old monasteries sitting alongside modern glass-fronted buildings. As the gateway to the steppe, it's the perfect place to experience modern Mongolian life before heading into the wilderness.

Day 3: Explore Ulaanbaatar Meals: B, L, D

Begin the day at Gandan Monastery, Mongolia's largest and most important monastery, where you can observe the monks' morning chants and learn about the country's unique form of Buddhism. Continue to the central Genghis Khan Square before exploring the Chinggis Khaan Museum.

This evening, enjoy a traditional music and dance performance featuring throat singing, folk instruments and colourful costumes. Sightseeing today is leisurely and flat, taking around 2-3 hours on foot.

Destination Information

Gandan Monastery – Mongolia's most important monastery and a peaceful place to watch local life unfold. It's still home to many practising monks and a giant golden statue of a Buddhist figure called Avalokitesvara. You'll often hear the sound of morning chanting as you explore the grounds.

Genghis Khan Square – Located in the centre of Ulaanbaatar, this large square is named after Mongolia's most famous leader. A huge statue of Genghis Khan sits in front of the Parliament building, making it a great spot to take in the city's mix of modern and traditional life.

Chinggis Khaan Museum – Opened in 2022, this striking eight-storey landmark in central Ulaanbaatar holds over 10,000 artefacts chronicling the life of the man who built the largest

contiguous empire in history. Weapons, royal regalia, manuscripts, and multimedia displays span the full reach of Mongol power. It's the most comprehensive collection of its kind in the world, and a must for anyone passing through Mongolia's capital.

Day 4: Naadam Festival – Day 1 Meals: B, L, D

Over the next two days, you will experience Mongolia's most spectacular cultural event first-hand — the annual Naadam Festival. Often described as the Nomadic Olympics, this vibrant celebration brings together locals and nomads from across the country for three days of wrestling, archery and horse racing. The festivities begin with the grand Opening Ceremony at Central Stadium, where a colourful procession of athletes, officials and monks marks the start of competition before the first rounds of wrestling and archery get underway in the afternoon.

Please note that tickets to all arenas are allocated by the local government tourist authority in the weeks leading up to the festival, so the exact programme will be confirmed with you during your trip.

Destination Information

Naadam Festival – Often described as the "Nomadic Olympics," the Naadam Festival is Mongolia's most spectacular cultural event, with origins dating back to the era of Chinggis Khaan. This vibrant national celebration showcases the three skills historically essential for any Mongol warrior: wrestling, archery, and horse racing.

Day 5: Naadam Festival – Day 2 Meals: B, L, D

Head 50km outside the city to the open steppe for the most exhilarating event of the festival — the cross-country horse races. Known as tumnii ekh, or 'leader of ten thousand', the races are a highlight among the younger competitors, with jockeys as young as five years old displaying extraordinary skill and bravery across the vast Mongolian landscape. Enjoy a boxed lunch in the field, soaking up the atmosphere, and later return to Ulaanbaatar.

Destination Information

Tumnii Ekh – For a captivating introduction to Mongolian performing arts, the Tumen Ekh Ensemble offers an award-winning showcase of the country's most ancient traditions. This world-renowned folk troupe brings together master musicians, dancers, and throat singers for a powerful, high-energy performance.

Day 6: Terelj National Park Meals: B, L, D

Today you'll head out of the city and into the wild beauty of Terelj National Park. On the way, make a stop to admire the colossal Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue, an eye-catching monument on the open steppe and the largest of its kind in the world.

Continue on to Terelj National Park to see the iconic Turtle Rock and visit the serene Aryabal Temple, tucked into the hills. Return to Ulaanbaatar.

Destination Information

Genghis Khan Equestrian Complex – Rising 40 metres from the steppe, the Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue is the largest equestrian statue in the world. Located on the banks of the Tuul River, the statue celebrates the legacy of Mongolia's most iconic leader. Visitors can take an elevator to the horse's head for panoramic views, and explore the museum beneath, which offers insight into Mongol history and culture.

Turtle Rock – Shaped by wind and time, this granite formation in Gorkhi-Terelj National Park resembles a giant turtle. It's one of the most recognisable landmarks in the park and makes a great photo stop.

Aryabal Temple – Located in the hills above Terelj National Park, Aryabal Temple is a peaceful meditation centre with sweeping views. The temple, influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, is reached by a short uphill walk along a path lined with Buddhist teachings. Inside, colourful murals and a quiet atmosphere provide space for reflection.

Day 7: Ulaanbaatar – South Gobi Meals: B, L, D

Fly 1 hour south to Dalanzadgad, your entry point to the vast Gobi Desert. On arrival, start your travels by comfortable 4WD and stop by a local market for a glimpse of daily life. Then drive around 1-hour into Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park for a walk through the striking Yol Valley, where towering cliffs and narrow gorges create dramatic scenery.

This evening, settle into your premium ger or hotel on the edge of the desert.

Please note: the walk through Yol Valley takes about 2 hours round trip. The terrain is generally flat but includes some uneven, rocky sections. Depending on the time of year and weather conditions, there may still be occasional ice patches, so please wear appropriate footwear, exercise caution and follow the guidance of your National Escort.

Destination Information

Yol Valley – Located in the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, Yol Valley is a dramatic gorge carved by ancient rivers. Despite being in the heart of the desert, the valley is known for its cool microclimate, narrow canyons, occasional ice and for spotting wildlife such as ibex and eagles.

Day 8: South Gobi – Khongoryn Els

Meals: B, L, D

Drive 3-4 hours (180km) through breathtaking desert landscapes, passing roaming camel herds and their nomadic herders, as you make your way to Khongoryn Els, home to some of the tallest sand dunes in Mongolia. Explore this dramatic landscape, with the option to climb to the top for sweeping views of the Gobi.

Settle into your premium ger camp for a two-night stay and enjoy dinner under the stars.

Please note: climbing the sand dunes is optional. The ascent is steep and strenuous, so only attempt if you feel comfortable.

Destination Information

Khongoryn Els – Known as the "Singing Sands," Khongoryn Els is one of Mongolia's largest and most spectacular sand dune areas. Some dunes reach heights of up to 300 metres and stretch for over 100 kilometres across the Gobi Desert. The name comes from the sound the sand makes when the wind moves across it.

Day 9: Khongoryn Els

Meals: B, L, D

Today is dedicated to discovering the landscapes and lifestyle of the Gobi. See the dramatic contrasts of Khongoryn Els up close, where rolling sand dunes meet unexpected pockets of green oases.

Meet a local camel herding family and learn how they've adapted to life in this harsh but beautiful environment. Later, enjoy time at leisure to relax or take in more of the desert before returning to camp for a hearty Mongolian dinner.

Destination Information

Nomadic Camel Herders – Near Khongoryn Els, nomadic families live in the desert and raise Bactrian camels. They use the camels for transport, milk, and wool. Meeting these herders is a special chance to learn about a traditional way of life that has stayed the same for generations.

Day 10: Khongoryn Els – Bayanzag Meals: B, L, D

Journey 3-4hrs (150km) by 4WD across the open steppe to Bayanzag, known as the 'Flaming Cliffs' for the vivid red glow of its sandstone, especially at sunset. Explore the area on foot, walking through the site where dinosaur fossils were first uncovered in the 1920s.

Your guide will share stories of the region's remarkable paleontological discoveries before you settle in for the night at your premium ger camp.

Destination Information

Flaming Cliffs – Known for their deep red hues that seemingly glow at sunset, the Flaming Cliffs of Bayanzag are one of Mongolia's most iconic sights. It was here in the 1920s that American explorer Roy Chapman Andrews made groundbreaking fossil discoveries, including the world's first dinosaur eggs. The area remains a key site for paleontologists and offers striking desert views.

Day 11: Bayanzag – Ongiin Hiid Meals: B, L, D

Depart for Ongiin Khiid, a peaceful riverside site, taking around 3 hours (160km) by 4WD. Once home to one of Mongolia's largest monastic complexes, the ruins here tell the story of a once-thriving spiritual centre. Explore the remains on foot and hear about its turbulent past before an overnight stay in a standard ger camp by the Ongi River.

Destination Information

Ongiin Khiid – Ongiin Khiid sits beside the Ongi River and was once one of Mongolia's biggest monasteries. It was destroyed in the 1930s, but you can still see its peaceful ruins and a small rebuilt temple, giving insight into Mongolia's past.

Day 12: Ongiin Hiid – Karakorum Meals: B, L, D

Go deeper into the heart of Mongolia as you drive approximately 5 hours to the ancient capital of Karakorum, once the seat of Genghis Khan's great empire.

Later, explore the ancient sites within Karakorum and visit the Karakorum Museum and get comprehensive introduction to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Orkhon River Valley.

Destination Information

Karakorum – Once the capital of the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan, Kharkorin (also known as Karakorum) lies in the Orkhon Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Though little remains of the ancient city, it's a place of huge historical importance, where the past of the empire meets the culture of modern Mongolia.

Karakorum Museum – The museum presents archaeological finds from the Orkhon Valley and artefacts from the 13th-century city of Kharkhorin. Its exhibits include stone inscriptions, ceramics, metalwork, and models that illustrate the layout and history of Mongolia's former capital.

Day 13: Explore Karakorum — Meals: B, L, D

Step into the past at the Erdene Zuu Monastery, where Tibetan-style temples stand amid sweeping steppe views, and browse the engaging exhibits of the Karakorum Museum.

Later, visit a nomadic family and enjoy a Mongolian BBQ and sample Airag, a traditional milk vodka drink.

Destination Information

Erdene Zuu Monastery – Built in 1586, Erdene Zuu is Mongolia's oldest Buddhist monastery and stands on the site of ancient Karakorum. Surrounded by white walls and traditional stupas, it blends religious heritage with layers of Mongol history. Though once damaged during Soviet rule, parts of the monastery are still active today.

Airag – Also known as Kumis, Airag is fresh mare's milk placed in a cowhide sack (khokhuur) and fermented, often stirred thousands of times over one to two days. It has a sharp, sour, and mildly alcoholic flavour, similar to a very tart yogurt or kefir. As a symbol of hospitality and nomadic life, it is served to guests, particularly during the Naadam festival.

Day 14: Karakorum – Khustai National Park — Meals: B, L, D

Drive 3-4 hours this morning to Khustai National Park, a protected reserve known for its population of wild takhi horses, also called Przewalski's horses.

Learn about how these rare animals were brought back from the brink of extinction, and now roam freely across the grassy plains, alongside deer, marmots and a variety of birdlife.

Head out into the steppe to find them, then settle into your premium ger camp.

Destination Information

Khustai National Park – Located just two hours from Ulaanbaatar, Khustai National Park is best known for its successful reintroduction of the wild takhi horses. But the park is also home to a range of wildlife, including marmots, red deer, and golden eagles, as well as rolling steppe landscapes.

Takhi – The takhi, also known as Przewalski's horse, is the world's last truly wild horse. Once extinct in the wild, it was reintroduced to Mongolia in the 1990s through conservation efforts. Stocky and strong, the takhi is a symbol of Mongolian wildlife and freedom.

Day 15: Return to Ulaanbaatar — Meals: B, L, D

Spend the morning watching a traditional Mongol nomadic show whilst soaking up the natural beauty of Khustai National Park before returning to Ulaanbaatar. The afternoon is yours to relax or visit the Main Square.

This evening, gather with your fellow travellers for a farewell dinner to toast an unforgettable journey.

Days 16-17: Depart Ulaanbaatar to Australia — Meals: B

Any time before your flight is at leisure. You will be transferred from your hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight.

Late check-out is not included. Additional nights before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.

MONGOLIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Australian passport holders do not need a visa for Mongolia if they are travelling for less than 30 days for tourist purposes. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

All information with regards to visas will be updated regularly on our website as we find visas process' are changing on regular basis.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website https://www.wendywutours.com.au/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/

INSURANCE:

It is a condition of your booking that you are insured for the duration of your trip. We recommend comprehensive travel insurance to cover cancellation, medical requirements, luggage, repatriations and additional expenses. At a minimum, the policy is required to cover medical requirements including medical evacuations / repatriations. The choice of insurer is yours.

We strongly suggest you purchase insurance at the time you pay your deposit. This is because cancellation fees and charges are payable from that time. We may request you to provide evidence that you have taken out and paid for a policy to comply with this condition. If you fail to provide a certificate of currency of insurance within a reasonable time after our request, then this will be deemed a cancellation by you and standard cancellation fees will apply.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation throughout the tour has been carefully selected for its convenient location, comfort, and authentic character. Outside of Ulaanbaatar, standards tend to be simpler than what you may be accustomed to, with fewer Western-style amenities. Properties are generally rated at a local three- to four-star standard; however, hotels and camps do not follow an international rating system, so facilities and quality may vary from those in Australia. Should you have any concerns during your stay, your National Escort will be happy to assist.

Ger camps – A "ger" is the traditional home of nomads across Mongolia. Constructed from a wooden frame covered with layers of felt and canvas, and raised on wooden platforms, these circular tents are insulated to withstand Mongolia's harsh climate. Inside, you'll find warm fabrics, furs, and beautifully crafted wooden furniture, designed to provide comfort and practicality. Gers, also known as yurts, typically feature two or three single wooden beds with linens, a heating stove, thick blankets, one electrical socket, and a low table with chairs.

Standard Ger camps – A standard Ger has clean, shared bathroom facilities and wood-burning heating.

Premium Ger camps – Premium Gers feature private en-suite bathrooms and often electric heating systems.

Electricity and hot water – The supply of electricity is limited in the country, as is the supply of hot water, however the majority of camps we use offer 24-hour electricity and hot water. Cafes and communal areas are often located within the camp grounds. Most of the camps will also have a laundry service available, at a small fee payable locally.

EATING IN MONGOLIA:

All meals (plus 1 litre of water per person, per day) are included in this tour, from dinner on the day of the groups arrival, until breakfast on the day of departure. Our schedule of meals is designed so that you can experience the local dishes, their individual flavours as well as different ways they are prepared and cooked. Lunches will often be lunch box style provided by the camp due to the long drives between towns.

Food in Mongolia, especially outside Ulaanbaatar, tends to be simple due to limited ingredient availability. Expect to eat mutton (used in a variety of ways), beef, potato, rice, noodles, eggs, peanut butter, cheese, tomato, onion, carrot, sheep's milk, and occasionally yak. We recommend bringing along your favourite tea, coffee, and snacks from home to enjoy during your journey.

Restricted or vegetarian diets can be catered for on a limited basis, offering options like noodles, rice, and steamed vegetables. Expect meals to be repetitive and basic due to the limited ingredient availability. Please let us know in advance if you have dietary needs or any specific concerns.

MONEY:

The official currency in Mongolia is the "tugrik" (MNT), which is widely accepted across the country. Whilst most establishments only accept MNT, some Ger camps and souvenir shops may also take USD. In Ulaanbaatar, towns and villages, major credit cards such as Visa and Mastercard are commonly accepted. ATMs are easily accessible in Ulaanbaatar and most villages. Please alert your bank of your travel plans prior to departure to avoid your card being blocked.

Travellers can bring USD (printed after 2018), GBP, Euros, with a cash limit of 15,000 USD that can be exchanged at banks. Travellers' checks can also be converted into cash at banks with a fee. Any remaining MNT can be exchanged back into USD or Euros.

ELECTRICITY:

In Mongolia, the standard voltage is 220 V, and round pinned European style plugs are used. Most Ger camps provide electricity for charging batteries and mobile phones. Consider bringing a portable power bank for convenience (If travelling via China you will require a 3C/CCC certified power bank, else it will be confiscated).

DEVELOPMENT IN MONGOLIA AND WHAT TO EXPECT:

We encourage you to embrace both the rewards and challenges of travelling in a developing country. While Mongolia is rapidly evolving, it still differs from the UK in terms of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility and safety may not always match those at home. For example, you might encounter road hazards like uncovered holes without warning signs or safety barriers.

Wendy Wu Tours, together with our trusted partners in Mongolia, carefully designs itineraries using local knowledge to offer the best-paced sightseeing possible. However, please be aware that factors such as weather conditions, road construction, and occasional closures of sights may affect the schedule. Your National Escort will do everything possible to minimise disruption but cannot guarantee against delays, changes, or, in rare cases, cancellations of parts of the itinerary.

Some accommodation along the way may be simpler than the usual Wendy Wu Tours standard, offering a more rustic experience. These stays provide a unique chance to connect with Mongolia's traditional nomadic lifestyle in truly memorable surroundings.

English is spoken at a basic level in Mongolia, making your National Escort an invaluable guide throughout your trip.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Mongolia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognise that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

TRANSPORT:

Mongolia's 100,000km road network is approximately 20% paved, with the remainder comprising dirt tracks. Even sealed roads can become uneven over time due to the extreme climate.

Vehicles – In Ulaanbaatar and Terelj, we use air-conditioned coaches. For all remote touring, we use well-maintained, air-conditioned 4x4 Land Cruisers and minivans, purpose-suited to the terrain and chosen with your comfort and safety firmly in mind. Each 4WD has its own driver who

speaks limited English but will communicate closely with your National Escort. Each vehicle accommodates a maximum of three guests, with the National Escort rotating among vehicles as a fourth passenger. Groups will travel together in convoy, aiming to stay within sight of each other throughout the day. Private use of a 4WD is not included.

In the absence of road signs, drivers may occasionally stop at a nearby Ger to confirm directions.

Seatbelts – Seatbelts are not compulsory by law in Mongolia, and it is common for local drivers not to use them. For your safety, we strongly recommend that you use seatbelts whenever they are available and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving.

Domestic Flights – Mongolia is served by only two domestic airlines, often one flight a day. Flight schedules are subject to change without prior notice, most commonly due to weather conditions, and delays or significant time adjustments can occur.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.travelvax.com.au.

WEATHER:

Mongolia's weather from May to September offers the best conditions for travel, with generally mild to warm temperatures and long daylight hours. Spring (May) can still be quite cool, especially in the mornings and evenings, with occasional chilly winds and the possibility of lingering ice in mountainous areas. Summer (June to August) brings pleasantly warm days, often ranging from 20°C to 30°C, though temperatures can drop sharply at night, so layering is essential. We recommend packing warm, thin layers, a good jacket, gloves, and sturdy walking shoes.

Rain is relatively rare but occasional showers do occur, so a light waterproof jacket is advisable. Due to Mongolia's vast landscapes and varying elevations, weather conditions can change quickly, so be prepared for a range of temperatures throughout your adventure.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks before departure.

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