



Everyday Life in Mongolia: Independent Tour

Mongolia Independent Tour

19th May – 1st June (4500 EUR)

Overview

This adventure has been designed to visit some of Mongolia's lesser-visited regions and to include **extended interaction with local people** to get a feel for everyday life in this beautiful country.

From Mongolia's cities, towns and its famed countryside, we'll interact and learn from its indigenous population. Along the way, we will get the opportunity to try **local cuisine**, experience **local life** and see the country's ever-changing scenery. Mongolia is famed for its wide-open, expansive steppe, but it is also home to forests, mountains, desert, lakes and tundra.

Our route takes us from the country's growing capital, **Ulaanbaatar** travelling west, following a route rarely traversed by foreign tourists as we aim for Mongolia's most beautiful region, **Bayan Olgii**.



What's Included?

Included:

- All meals during the trip
- All accommodation during the program
- Drivers and Vehicles
- Local guide
- Tour leader
- Entrance fees to national parks
- Cook
- Local flights Ulgii-Ulaan Bataar

Not Included:

- International flights
- Visa
- Travel insurance
- Charges for excess baggage
- Airport taxes
- Individual equipment
- Drinks and extra expenses
- All alcoholic drinks





Itinerary Overview

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| Day 1. Sunday 19 th May | Explore Ulaanbaatar & Enjoy a Local Family Meal |
| Day 2. Monday 20 th May | From Modern Capitals to Ancient Capitals |
| Day 3. Tuesday 21 st May | Ancient Mongolia to Volcanic Landscapes |
| Day 4. Wednesday 22 nd May | Mountain Camp Visiting |
| Day 5. Thursday 23 rd May | Mongolia's Inland Seas |
| Day 6. Friday 24 th May | Off-road to Hovd |
| Day 7. Saturday 25 th May | Drive to Bayan Olgii |
| Day 8. Sunday 26 th May | Visiting Dayan lake for a family welcome |
| Day 9. Monday 27 th May | Exploring the Altai mountains |
| Day 10. Tuesday 28 th May | Migrate with the Herders |
| Day 11. Wednesday 29 th May | Continue the Migration |
| Day 12. Thursday 30 th May | Return to Bayan Olgii |
| Day 13. Friday 31 st June | Return to Ulaanbaatar |
| Day 14. Saturday 1 st June | Departure Day |

Price: 4500 EUR ((based on 4 star hotel)

Extra: 5 star hotel upgrade 200 EUR



Day 1

Sunday

Explore Ulaanbaatar & Enjoy a Local Family Meal

Flying from Frankfurt, your flight will arrive in Ulaanbaatar at **5:20 AM**. As with all our tours, an **Absolute Nomads representative** will be there to meet you and escort you to the Hotel.

After a chance to rest, we'll meet for lunch and a short tour briefing at a nearby local restaurant, followed by an afternoon exploring some of the sights of **Ulaanbaatar**.

Just a stone's throw from our Hotel lies the central **Sükhbaatar Square**, named after the revolutionary hero **Damdinii Sükhbaatar**, whose statue proudly marks the centre of this grand square. At the northern end of the square, the towering statues of **Genghis Khan**, his son, grandson, and his generals watch from a commanding position.

Five minutes from Sükhbaatar Square, our next stop beckons. The well-appointed **National History Museum**; museums may not be everyone's cup of tea, however, this one helps bring some semblance of Mongolian history, providing some useful context before we set out.

Departing the museum, we leave on foot. Walking through the city is a perfect way to travel as when Ulaanbaatar was planned and built in the 1950's it was designed to be a city without cars and so, these days, some journeys are quicker on foot. Our destination is the famed **State Department Store**, a remnant of the Soviet period but still a national institution visited by tourists and locals alike.

Having completed our shopping, we'll continue our stroll down Ulaanbaatar's central street: **Peace Avenue**, making our way to the beautiful **Gandantegchinlen Monastery**, Ulaanbaatar's largest and most impressive **Buddhist Monastery**. Here will have a chance to learn about the role of Mongolia's largest religion and how it survived the darker days of communism and, time permitting, get to see the resident **monks chanting**.

Following our walking tour of Mongolia's capital, we will visit a **local family for dinner**; it's here that our hosts will cook up some traditional Mongolian cuisine. It may be a little cramped, but we will begin learning about the Mongolian way of life and hospitality.

Accommodation: *3-Star Hotel*

Included Meals: *Breakfast (optional), Lunch, Dinner*

Day 2

Monday

From Modern Capitals to Ancient Capitals

This morning after a hearty breakfast, we'll depart early to escape the Monday morning traffic. Our destination for today is the ancient **Mongolian capital of Karakorum**.

Karakorum was the former capital of the **Mongolian Empire**. At the height of the empire, it was from Karakorum that Genghis Khan's son, Ogedei Khan, would rule the largest land empire the world has ever known.

During Karakorum's golden age, much of the city was comprised of tents, and as the Mongolian empire declined, the city's decay was rapid. These days, all that remains of this once-great settlement is the impressive **Erdene Zuu Monastery**, as well as a few scattered but not unimpressive **archaeological finds**.

As we leave Ulaanbaatar, we will pass through its many residential, commercial and industrial layers. Eventually, the city gives way to the vast countryside. Rolling hills, grass steppe and rocky outcrops. It's here we will begin seeing **traditional Mongolian tents** dotted throughout the landscape.

As we go, we will stop at the **Mongol Els Dunes**, a small dune system that offers a picturesque stop and the possibility of meeting with a camel herder or two.

Once we arrive at Karakorum, our first stop will be Erdene Zuu Monastery; it may be a shadow of its former self; however, it is still impressive. We'll hopefully catch the resident monks in their afternoon prayer. Following our monastery visit, we will call at the **unique archaeological museum** to see some recent historical finds.

Accommodation: *Urguu Ger camp*

A beautiful ger camp situated far from the city on the steppes overlooking the region. If we're lucky we'll catch one of the area's famed sunsets.

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 3

Tuesday

From an Ancient Imperial City to Volcanic Landscapes

You may not want to leave the confines of our romantic accommodation this morning; however, the journey continues. After breakfast, our first stop is the **local market** to sample a little of resident life here in this remote town. **Kharkhorin market** trade is mainly conducted from disused shipping containers making for some great photography and local interaction.

Once we have stocked up on supplies for the journey, we continue onwards to the west, following Mongolia's ever-changing scenery. Our course begins trailing the country's famed **Orkhon River and its UNESCO listed valley.**

Today we are genuinely in **Mongolia's heartland**, passing **local nomads** making this beautiful yet harsh landscape their own. Today's destination will become obvious as we drive past evidence of this region's active, volcanic past, including the impressive **Chuluutiin Gol Gorge.**

Chuluutiin Gol is a 30-metre-long fault line that runs the length of the aptly named **River of Pearls**; this deep-sided canyon is a real treat. From the canyon we push onwards; our eventual destination for today is the **Khorgo Mountain**. Khorgo Mountain is not just any mountain but a dormant volcano, one of a handful in the region. Khorgo makes for an exciting visit, as it's possible to climb its treelined slopes and peer into its sulphurous cone. We will have the perfect evening view from the top of the mountain before heading to our night's accommodation.

Accommodation: *Khorgo Ger Camp*

Khorgo Ger Camp is set up a little like a nomadic hotel in a traditional style. The nomadic tented dwellings are appointed a little like hotel rooms. There is a clean bathroom block with running water fed by the camp's own well. The restaurant on-site also makes a brilliant Mongolian stew!

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch Dinner*

Day 4

Wednesday

Into Mongolia's changing terrain

As we leave Mongolia's volcanic heartland, you may think that the scenery cannot get any better, although you'd be wrong. As we move on from the stunning craters, canyons, and lakes, we make our way into the domain of granite mountains, pine forests and alpine fields, punctuated by the ever-present tented dwelling of the Mongolian Ger.

Stopping for those all-important pictures and local interaction, we will be sure to visit some of the country's remoter towns to stock up on supplies and see how people live in these far-flung habitations. Some villages may indeed look like something from a wild west movie, but it's still someone's home, and we will see how proud Mongolians are of these areas.

Our aim for today, aside from enjoying the views and drive, is to locate a beautiful area for our first night's camp. In somewhere like Mongolia, the problem isn't a lack of suitable sites but being spoiled for choice. All being well, today's drive will be limited to allow a little more time to relax and enjoy a pleasant camp.

Accommodation: *camping*

Pitching our tents in amongst the green fields and alpine hills, we'll break and spend some time relaxing and soaking up the atmosphere.

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch Dinner*

Day 5

Thursday

Visiting Mongolia's Inland Sea

After breakfast, we're on the road again; continuing our adventure, we head into the remote province of **Uvs**, a land of lakes, mountains and dunes. Our destination is Mongolia's answer to an ocean in the form of **Khyargas Lake**.

Khyargas Lake was formed many thousands of years ago by glacial action; today, its high salt content and sheer size mean it's much like an inland sea. The area is a popular destination for locals to holiday but is rarely visited by western tourists.

As we journey through Uvs Province, we will stop to photograph the stunning scenery and make a few impromptu stops to visit local **Nomadic families**. As Uvs Province is so remote and not well connected to the rest of the country, many of its inhabitants have never met and interacted with foreign visitors, making it an exciting and unique visit.

Upon reaching Khyargas Lake, we will be sure to stop for a plunge into its salty waters and experience an ocean swim about as far away from the sea as you can imagine!

It may be a little bracing at this time of year, but a perfect wash before we set camp and enjoy an evening BBQ, hopefully catching the setting sun on the lake's shimmering surface.

Accommodation: *camping*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch Dinner*

Day 6

Friday

Off-Road Adventure to Khovd

As we bid farewell to **Khyargas Lake**, we also say goodbye to the comfort of a tarmac road for the morning as today we're off towards **Khovd** town.

While Khovd may be the **Khovd Province's regional capital**, like most settlements in Mongolia, it still has a pleasant small-town feel. We will make Khovd our home today and enjoy a little luxury as we stay in the town's newest hotel.

Whilst in Khovd, we will join a **local shaman** and view one of his **traditional rituals**. Shamanism has long been practised in Mongolia, and many Mongolians still hold dear this fascinating religion.

Following our meeting with the Shaman, we'll visit the town to see more of this far-flung settlement. We will call at the **city square** the **bustling market** and even take a quick look at some small shops surrounding the area. While exploring, we will call the local textiles shop and see where many locals still have their local dresses made (the Mongolian deel).

Before dinner, we will stop at the **opera house** for a **private visit** from where we will also view one of **Mongolia's famed throat singers**. Throat singing in Mongolia dates back many centuries past the time of Genghis Khan. Throat singing is a unique art that has to be viewed to be believed it's fitting that we see it here in Hovd; as many singers from the region win national competitions, the main event is held in this very spot every June.

This evening before bed, we make one final stop at a local family to enjoy a **traditional Mongolian meal**. This time we sample the delight known as **Khorkhog (authentic Mongolian barbeque)**.

Accommodation: *Steppe hotel*

A new build hotel with excellent views over the town of Hovd. Well-appointed rooms and great food.

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 7

Saturday

Drive to Bayan Olgii

Our adventure continues as we bid goodbye to Khovd and make our way to **Olgii**. We will stop for more photographs as we journey, especially at the picturesque **Tolbo Lake**. Tolbo was once the scene of an epic battle between the white Russians and the Bolsheviks, but all that remains here today is memories, as we stop to enjoy lunch next to the beautiful lake ringed by mountains.

In Sagsai, some eagle hunters use their mighty birds not only to hunt but also to bring in a few tourists; however, amongst these hunters of fortune are few well-known champions, one of whom has appeared in much of the world's media. **Serik Gingsbek** has appeared in the New York Times and the BBC, showing off his golden eagles and hunting skills; we'll be sure to stop by and say hi.

As we roll on, we work our way further into the remote countryside of Bayan Olgii, passing the **traditional Kazakh Yurts** and overwinter mud build dwellings. Well, be sure to stop at some of the **high passes** as we go to catch glimpses of the **distant mountains on the horizon**.

Our host family lives at the base of one of these mountains, managing their herds of livestock and surviving in this hostile environment. We are greeted with a traditional Kazakh welcome and given a chance to view how the family work and interacts. We can move around freely, taking photos, chatting and enjoying our time.

Tonight we pitch our tents next to the local family, using them only to sleep after enjoying a hearty meal and maybe a drink or two.

Accommodation: *Camping*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 8

Sunday

Visiting Dayan lake for a family welcome

This morning before we depart, our host will give us a brief **demonstration of how to handle an eagle**. He will be in **traditional Kazakh dress**, making for perfect photography in the early morning light. Leaving our host family, we pass by **Black Lake** on our way to the famed **Altai mountain range** and the beautiful yet rarely visited Dayan lake.

Dayan lake sits nestled in the remote province of **Bayan Olgii**, close to the Chinese border mountains and larch forests ring this secluded lake. Home to many Kazakh nomad families, the area is a hive of activity in the summer months, but as winter approaches, families begin their staged migration to their autumnal dwellings.

As well as the natural beauty, the local people are the reason for our visit, as we're here to join a host family for the next couple of days as they prepare and move to a new location for the coming weeks.

We'll set up our tents alongside the family and have an afternoon of rest; you can use this time to learn a little more about our hosts, enjoy a stroll in the surrounding area or relax, enjoy the scenery and breath the incredibly pure air.

Tonight we'll enjoy a **local meal with our hosts whilst sharing a few drinks** next to a roaring log fire.

Accommodation: *Family Camping Experience*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 9

Monday

Exploring the Altai mountains

As we're here for a second night, the beauty of this morning is that we do not need to break camp, although those into photography may want to wake early to catch the livestock being milked and realised to roam.

Today you have free time to interact further with the local family or join us for a mini-adventure; we will carry a packed lunch and head to the nearby mountains for a hike to higher climbs. At each step, the view behind us becomes even more stunning; and the adventure even more thrilling when you realise that there are very few souls around us, bar the locals in the valley below.

Once we have reached our limit for the hike, we'll capture enough photographs of the breathtaking view and enjoy lunch before we slowly return to our Kazakh hosts.

This afternoon for those who wish, further exploration awaits with a drive to the shores of Dayan lake; if you are lucky, you may even catch sight of some of the rare birdlife that migrates through and shelters in this far away haven.

Later this afternoon we will gather together to learn a little more about the coming day's migration and for those who wish a little Mongolian horse instruction.

Accommodation: *Family Camping Experience*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 10

Tuesday

Migration with Mongolian nomads

Today we don't bid farewell to our host family but join them as they begin the process of moving on with their many hundreds of animals keeping ahead of the seasons, especially the notorious Mongolian winter.

Once we've packed and prepared, our camp will be stowed and moved ahead of us whilst we begin the trek with the family and animals. It's slow going as goats, sheep, horses, and possibly one or two camels and yak are driven onwards away from Dayan lake.

For this coming adventure, you have three options: ride a horse, walk or sit and enjoy the comfort of the 4X4. It is, of course, acceptable to swap and change throughout the day. As we journey, the photographic opportunities are plentiful, capturing this annual migration with people whose ancestors have been treading the same land for many hundreds of years.

As we wander along, a warm lunch will keep us fueled, and the waiting camp will help us relax and rest those saddle-sore legs.

Accommodation: *Family Camping Experience*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 11

Wednesday

Day 2 of the Autumn migration

It's another day on the trail as we awake early, helping our hosts prepare and following the same schedule as the previous day.

The routine may be the same, but the Mongolian scenery ahead is ever-changing. Today the landscape will transition from high mountain steppe to narrower valleys and more stunning mountains; we'll also follow mountain rivers past rocky outcrops and into expansive lakes as we make a journey you'll certainly be able to share with those at home.

These last warm days of summer may be tinged with the coming chilly autumnal winds, but we will keep going with the family until they reach the sanctuary of their comfortable autumn home. With a few cheers from us mixed with the bleating and braying of the animals, we will once again have our tents ready and waiting.

Tonight it will be time to celebrate by enjoying a beer or two alongside the warmth of a Mongolian fire whilst our cook rustles up some delicious traditional Kazakh cuisine.

You should sleep well tonight knowing that you've taken part in something that many people come to watch but few ever take part in!

Accommodation: *Family Camping Experience*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 12

Thursday

Riding with Eagle hunters before Olgii city

Today we say a final goodbye to our hosts as we start our migration back to Olgii city, but don't be too downhearted, as we still have another adventure ahead of us.

Before reaching the city, we'll meet one of our family eagle hunters and travel with him on horseback to see how actual eagle hunting is done.

Like many activities involving animals, we may well be lucky and see the magnificent eagle swoop in for a kill, or it may not be his day. Whatever the day, there will undoubtedly be unique opportunities to catch sight of the hunter and his bird in action amongst breathtaking scenery.

Once we've finished its back to the city of **Olgii**, working our way through the last stretch of our off-road journey, there is still some beautiful scenery to admire and a stop at a remote Mongolian village before we finally make it back to the comfort of our **Ger Camp**.

It's into those showers, a cold drink, and some relaxing if you wish; alternatively, you are welcome to head into town to explore a little more of this Kazakh city. The **Town Square, City Museum, Olgii Market** or the **local mosque** are worthy of a visit.

On many tours, the tour group rarely get to spend time understanding the local crew and rarely visit their families; however, tonight will get to meet and join some of the family of our guide, drivers, and cook whilst also enjoying some **traditional Kazakh cuisine**.

Accommodation: *Ger Camp*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 13

Friday

Return to Ulaanbaatar

This morning we say a fond farewell to our team as we board a plane and return to Mongolia's capital **Ulaanbaatar**. We arrive just after midday, where we will then be whisked to our Hotel at the heart of the city.

Following our arrival at the Hotel, you may wish to freshen up or head into the city for further exploration, maybe purchase some felt slippers or buy a cashmere jumper for a loved one. Alternatively, should you wish to, you can join us for one more adventure into the countryside to visit the **world's largest Genghis Khan Statue**.

The **Equestrian statue of Genghis Khan** is a 1 ½ hour drive from Ulaanbaatar, featuring the mighty man himself atop his horse. The figure is as grand as the legend of Genghis Khan himself, **23 metres** tall; visitors enter the monument and take an elevator to see views over the surrounding county side from the top of the horse's head. A touristy, surreal, yet exciting experience.

After returning to our Hotel, we will meet for our final meal, eating at one of the popular **local restaurants**.

Accommodation: *3-Star Hotel*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 14

Saturday

Departure Day

As with your arrival, all adventurers will be transferred to the airport no matter their flight times. If you have extra time, we will be happy to help with further plans or advise on other activities.

END OF TOUR



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