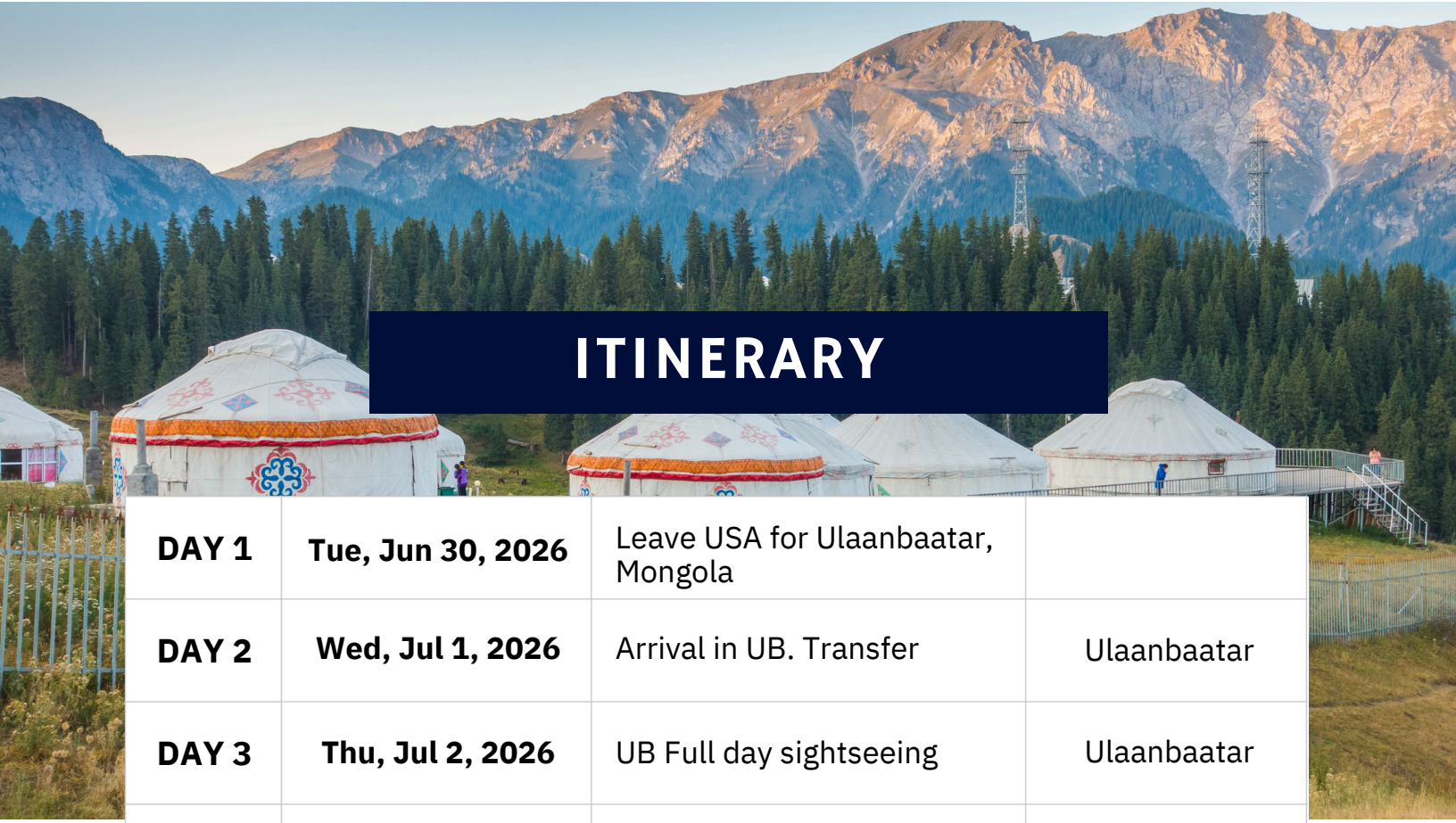
World Affairs Council of Greater Houston
Global Perspectives, *Local* Conversations

June 30 - July 12, 2027

MONGOLIA

Big Skies, Serene Steppes
Naadam Festival Special

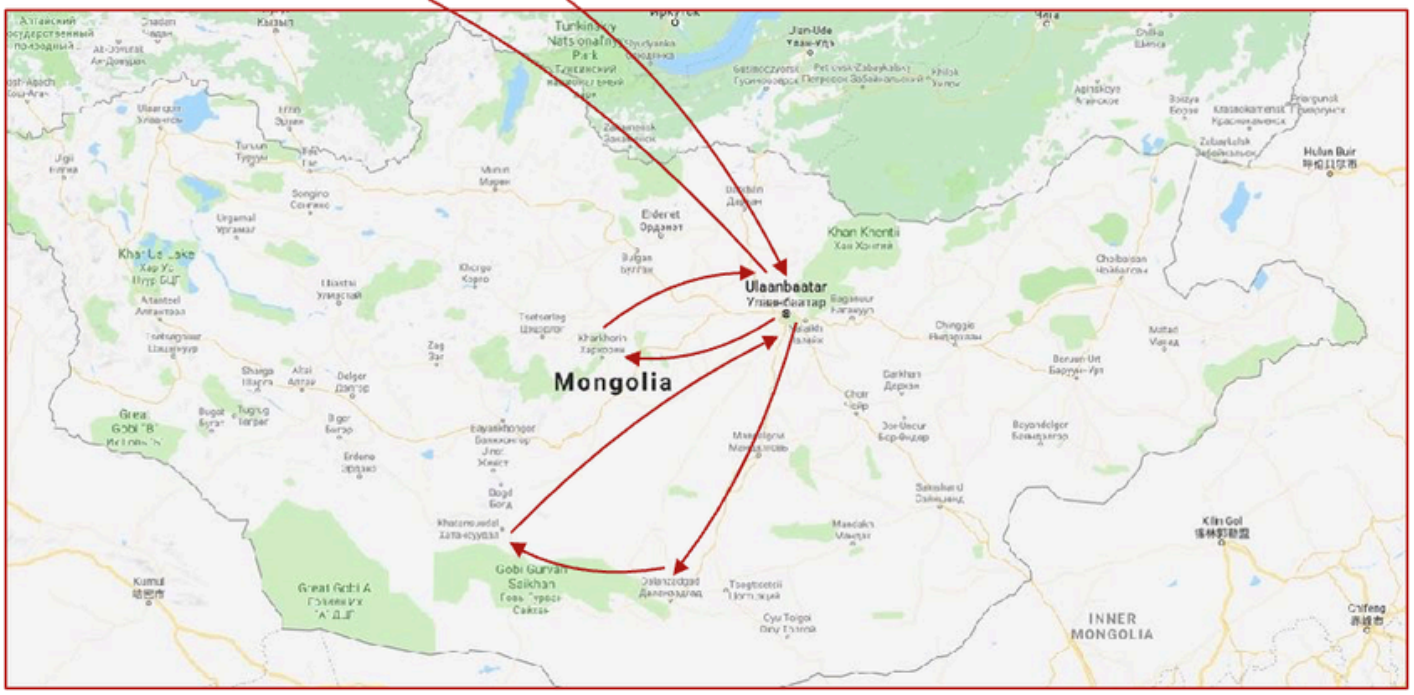


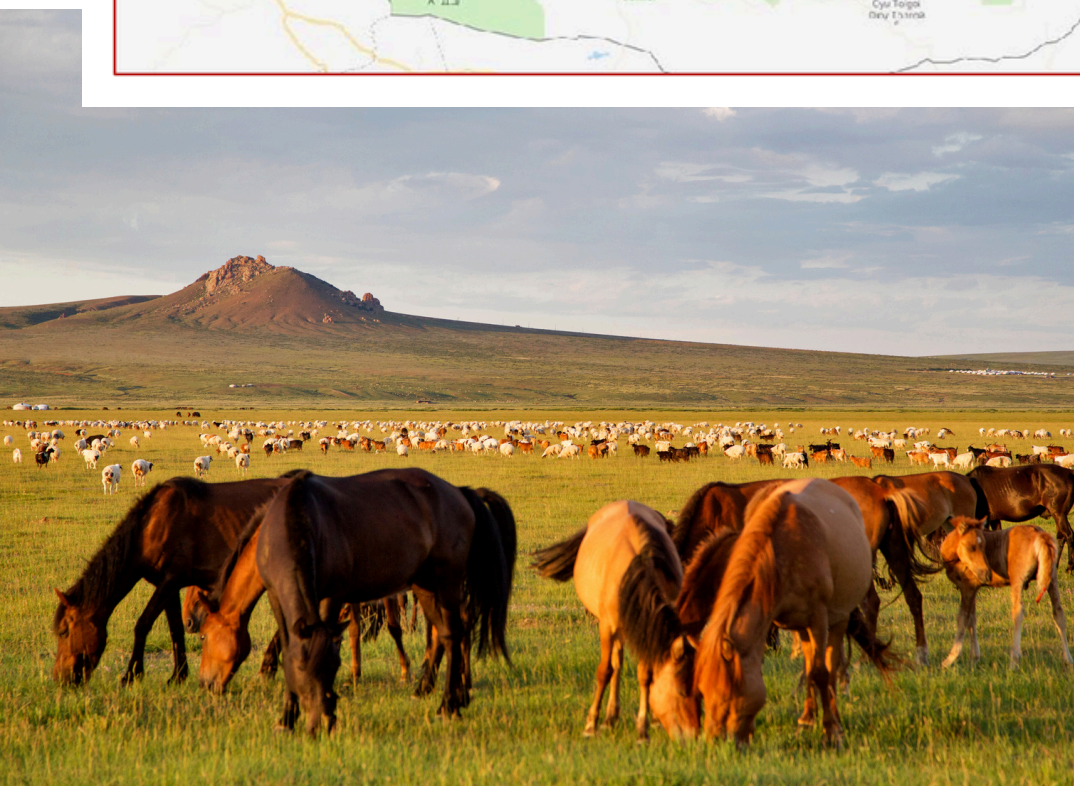


ITINERARY

DAY 1	**Tue, Jun 30, 2026**	Leave USA for Ulaanbaatar, Mongola	
DAY 2	**Wed, Jul 1, 2026**	Arrival in UB. Transfer	Ulaanbaatar
DAY 3	**Thu, Jul 2, 2026**	UB Full day sightseeing	Ulaanbaatar
DAY 4	**Fri, Jul 3, 2026**	Terelj National Park	Terelj
DAY 5	**Sat, Jul 4, 2026**	Fly to Gobi - Khongoryn sand dunes	Gobi Erdene
DAY 6	**Sun, Jul 5, 2026**	Bayanzag - Flaming Cliffs	Gobi Naran
DAY 7	**Mon, Jul 6, 2026**	Yol Valley - Gobi Gurvan Saikhan NP	Gobi Naran
DAY 8	**Tue, Jul 7, 2026**	Morning in Gobi - PM flight to UB	Ulaanbaatar
DAY 9	**Wed, Jul 8, 2026**	Bayangobi - Uvgun Monastery ruins	Bayangobi
DAY 10	**Thu, Jul 9, 2026**	Kharkhorin - Erdenezuu Monastery	Bayangobi
DAY 11	**Fri, Jul 10, 2026**	Khustai NP - Ulaanbaatar	Ulaanbaatar
DAY 12	**Sat, Jul 11, 2026**	Naadam Festival	Ulaanbaatar
DAY 13	**Sun, Jul 12, 2026**	Departure	

MAP TRAJECTORY









HIGHLIGHTS

Naadam Festival: Mongolian wrestling, archery, horse races.

Steppes, sheep, horses.

Smiling people.

Chinggis Khan.

Nomadic life, first hand.

Staying in ger camps.

Airag- fermented mare's milk.

Origins of Mongolian and Turkic empires.

Karakorum - capital of Chinggis's successors.

Przewalski's horse.

Gobi Desert.

Where dinosaurs were.

Lecture by a local Paleontologist.

Khongoryn Sand Dunes.

Mongolian Throat Singing.

INCLUDED

11 nights' accommodation with daily breakfast.

5 nights at hotel in Ulaanbaatar / 6 nights at ger camps.*

Lunches and dinners as indicated in the itinerary.

Naadam Festival Opening Ceremony & Gala Dinner.

Folkloric concert tickets.

English speaking professional tour guide.

Transportation by 4x4 vehicles.

Arrival and departure transfers - only for suggested flight arrival & departures.

Two small bottles of water per person per day on the vehicles everyday.

All entry fees to places mentioned in the itinerary.

Two domestic flights in Mongolia.

Porterage at hotels.

All tips Included.

* Note: A number of the ger camps have private facilities in the ger (yurt - Mongolian nomadic tent); but some may have shared shower/toilet areas, separate for men & women.

NOT INCLUDED

International airfare.

Visa fees if applicable.

Drinks with included meals, except tea or coffee for breakfast.

Personal expenditures like phone calls, laundry, medical expenses.

Travel insurance



GOOD TO KNOW

Ger camps

Guest gers are based on Mongolia's traditional circular felt dwelling. Facilities vary by camp; bathrooms and showers may be in a separate central building.

Road travel

Outside Ulaanbaatar, some journeys use unpaved roads. Travel times are approximate and may change with weather and surface conditions.

Walking

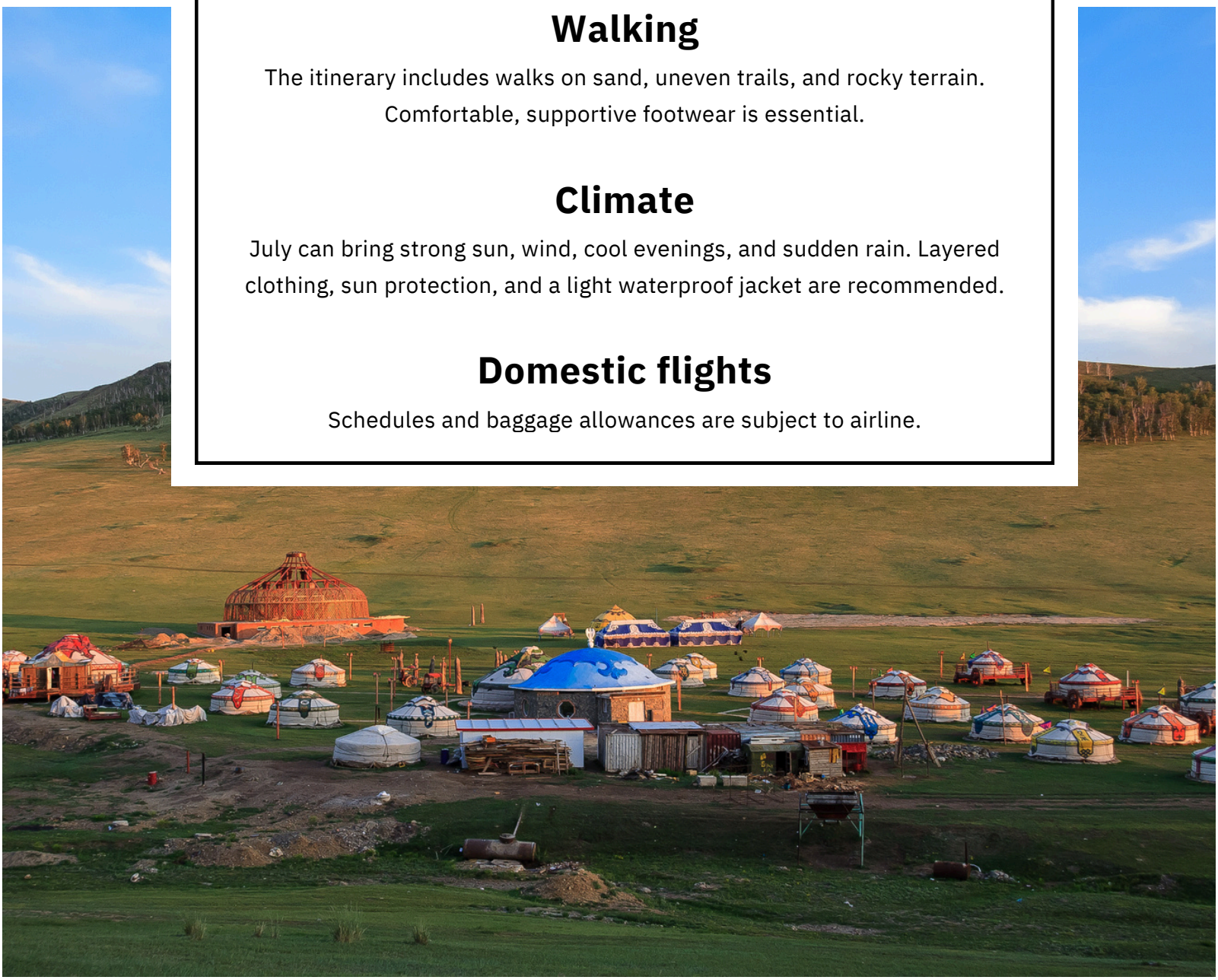
The itinerary includes walks on sand, uneven trails, and rocky terrain. Comfortable, supportive footwear is essential.

Climate

July can bring strong sun, wind, cool evenings, and sudden rain. Layered clothing, sun protection, and a light waterproof jacket are recommended.

Domestic flights

Schedules and baggage allowances are subject to airline.





SUGGESTED FLIGHTS

Suggested flights are on United Airlines

30 June UA 7	**Houston to Tokyo** **dep: 10:40 am / arr: 2:00 pm on July 1**
	Technical stop in Tokyo - 2h 30m
1 July UA 7	**Tokyo to Ulaanbaatar** **dep: 4:30 pm / arr: 8:55 pm**
12 July UA 6	**Ulaanbaatar to Tokyo** **dep: 9:55 am / arr: 3:45 pm**
	Technical stop in Tokyo - 1h 15m
12 July UA 6	**Tokyo to Houston** **dep: 5:00 pm / arr: 2:55 pm**

Economy class: $3,470

Business class: $6,719

Per person, including taxes, surcharges and fees as of October 15, 2026.

Fares are non-refundable and may change based on availability.

Preferred Travel Partner

UNITED

June 30 - July 12, 2027
13 Days/ 11 Nights

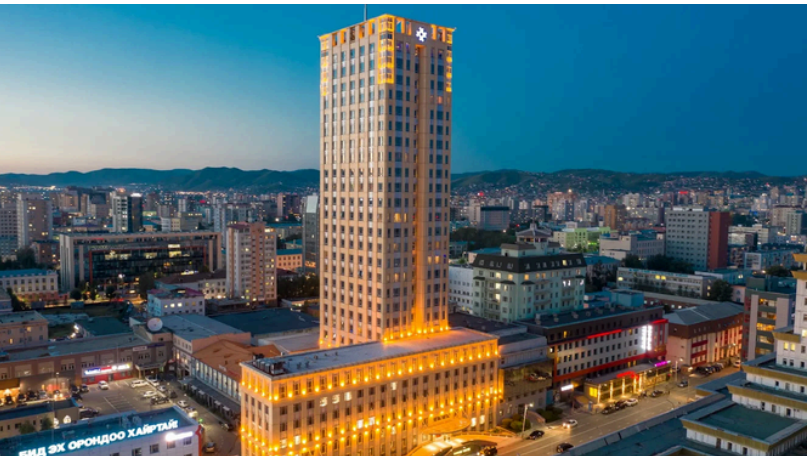
ACCOMMODATIONS

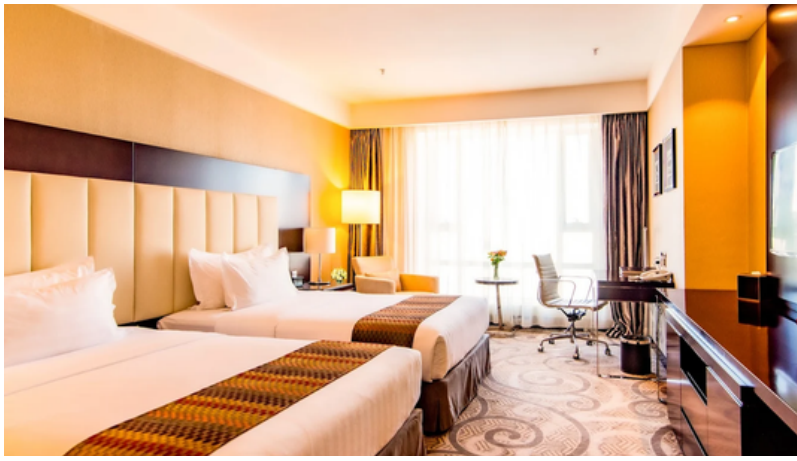
June 30 - July 12, 2027
13 Days/ 11 Nights

BW Premier Tuushin

Ulaanbaatar

bestwesternmongolia.mn/en





Alungoo Lodge

Terelj

tripadvisor.com





Hoyor Zagal Camp

Bayan Gobi

tripadvisor.com





ACCOMMODATIONS

June 30 - July 12, 2027
13 Days/ 11 Nights

Gobi Naran Camp

Bayanzag

tripadvisor.com





Gobi Erdene Camp

Khongoryn

tripadvisor.com







PROGRAM DETAILS

Day 1: Tue, June 30 **Leave USA**

We will leave Houston for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Overnight en route **Meals: -**

Day 2: Wed, July 1 **Ulaanbaatar**

Upon arrival at Chinggis Khan International Airport, you will be welcomed by our local team and transferred to our hotel in downtown Ulaanbaatar.

Rest of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar **Meals: -**

Ulaanbaatar, the historic and cultural heart of Mongolia, is a city where ancient heritage meets modern life. Founded as a nomadic **Buddhist monastic center** in **1639**, it has evolved through centuries from a mobile monastery to a permanent city, bearing witness to Mongolia's **rich history** and **resilience**. Today, Ulaanbaatar blends iconic sites like Sukhbaatar Square and the revered Gandan Monastery with contemporary districts, bustling markets, and vibrant art scenes.

Discover the legacy of the Mongol Empire at the National Museum, take in panoramic city views from Zaisan Hill, and experience **Mongolian traditions** through music, dance, and local cuisine, in this gateway to Mongolia's untamed landscapes.

Day 3: Thu, July 2 **Ulaanbaatar**

Our full day exploring the capital, Ulaanbaatar. We'll begin our day with a visit to Sukhbaatar Square, a vibrant area surrounded by landmarks such as the Parliament House, National Opera Theatre, Cultural Palace, and the House of City Council. We'll also tour the National History Museum, renowned for its comprehensive exhibits covering Mongolia's history from the Stone and Bronze Ages, through the Turkic and Mongol empires, the rise of Buddhism, and the communist period.

Enjoy lunch at a popular local restaurant. In the afternoon, we'll visit Zaisan Hill, a memorial honoring Russian soldiers who fought in World War II, offering panoramic views over Ulaanbaatar. We'll also stop by a cashmere factory to gain insight into the intricate process of cashmere production.

Before dinner, enjoy a captivating performance featuring traditional folk songs, throat singing, the melodic horse-headed fiddle, ethnic dances, and artful contortion.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar **Meals: B-L-D**

Day 4: Fri, July 3 **Terelj National Park**

Today, we'll drive to Terelj National Park, nestled in the Khentii Mountain range.

This popular getaway is known for its massive granite rock formations, including the famous "Crawling Turtle Rock," as well as its alpine forests and vibrant floral landscapes.

En route, we'll stop at the impressive Chinggis Khaan Monument. Our tour in the park includes visits to Turtle Rock, the Aryabala Monastery, and a nomadic family to experience their unique way of life.

Overnight in Terelj National Park **Meals: B-L-D**







The **Gobi Desert**, one of the **world's largest** and most captivating deserts, spans across southern Mongolia and northern China, covering vast stretches of rugged terrain, sand dunes, mountains, and unique rock formations.

Unlike traditional sandy deserts, the Gobi is known for its **diverse landscape**, where dramatic cliffs, vast steppes, and arid plains meet, creating a rugged beauty that captivates all who visit. This ancient desert is steeped in history, once forming part of the **Silk Road** and revealing a wealth of dinosaur fossils that tell stories of its prehistoric past.

Despite its harsh climate, the Gobi is home to **resilient wildlife**, including Bactrian camels, ibex, and rare snow leopards, and it supports traditional nomadic communities who have lived here for centuries.

The **Khongoryn Sand Dunes**, also known as the "Singing Dunes," are among the most spectacular features of Mongolia's Gobi Desert. Stretching over 180 kilometers and reaching heights of up to 300 meters, these golden dunes are framed by the scenic backdrop of the Sevrei and Zuulun mountain ranges.

Known for their mesmerizing "singing" sound—a deep hum created when the wind moves across the sand—the dunes offer a **surreal experience** for visitors. At the base of the dunes, the Khongor River forms a lush oasis, adding a vibrant green contrast to the otherwise arid landscape. Travelers can hike the dunes for panoramic views, ride two-humped Bactrian camels, and visit nearby **nomadic families** to gain insight into the traditional life of Mongolia's desert dwellers.

Day 5: Sat, July 4 **Gobi - Khongoryn Sand Dunes**

We'll catch an early morning flight to Dalanzadgad, the center of the South Gobi province. From there, we'll drive to the sand dunes, passing through the striking desert landscape, with its wide plains, stony and sandy terrain, unique rock formations, and herds of swift wild antelopes.

We'll arrive at the dunes in the afternoon, where we'll explore the remarkable Khongoriin Els dunes, stretching an impressive 180 km and spanning 7 to 20 km in width. These dunes lie along the northern side of the scenic Servei and Zuulun mountain ranges. When the wind blows, it creates a melodic hum across the 200-meter-high dunes, earning them the names "Singing Dunes" or "Sand that Sings." An oasis known as the Khongor River brings lush greenery in the summer months.

Here, we'll have the chance to ride two-humped Bactrian camels, affectionately known by locals as "Living Dinosaurs" and the "Princes of the Gobi," and observe the daily life of a camel-breeding family. Overnight at a traditional ger camp.

Overnight at Gobi Erdene Camp **Meals: B-L-D**

Day 6: Sun, July 5 **Bayanzag - Flaming Cliffs**

During breakfast at a local camp, we will enjoy a short lecture by a paleontologist. Today, we'll explore Bayanzag, famously known as the Flaming Cliffs. As we travel, we'll witness the dramatic transition from the steppe landscape to the arid desert, passing camel herds and herding families along the way.

A picnic lunch will be served in the heart of the Gobi. In the afternoon, we'll arrive at the ancient red rock formation of Bayanzag, which dates back 60 to 70 million years. This site became known as the Flaming Cliffs after Roy Andrew Chapman, an American explorer who visited Mongolia in the 1920s. The striking red cliffs are home to abundant dinosaur fossils, eggs, and bones, and are surrounded by bushy Saxual tree forests. We'll take a trek around the area before returning to the ger camp for an overnight stay.

Overnight at Gobi Naran Lodge **Meals: B-L-D**

Day 7: Mon, July 6 **Yol Valley - Gobi Gurvan Saikhan NP**

After breakfast, we'll drive to the majestic Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park to visit the stunning Yol Valley.

In the afternoon, we'll explore this unique narrow canyon formed by a river flowing through the Zuun Saikhan Mountain. The towering rock walls rise 200 meters, and the canyon is adorned with lush green meadows and a thick layer of glacier ice nestled between the cliffs. During the summer, rainfall feeds waterfalls that cascade from the top of the canyon walls. We'll have the opportunity to trek along the canyon and, if fortunate, catch sight of rare wildlife such as the wild sheep Argali, mountain goat Ibex, and the Yol Lammergeier.

Overnight at Gobi Naran Lodge **Meals: B-L-D**

Day 8: Tue, July 7 **Fly to Ulaanbaatar**

This morning, we'll visit a camel-breeding family. After enjoying an early lunch, we'll head to Dalanzadgad for our flight back to Ulaanbaatar.

Upon arrival, we'll enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before checking into our hotel.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar **Meals: B-L-D**



Day 9: Wed, July 8 **Bayangobi - Uvgun Monastery**

After an early breakfast, we'll begin our drive to Bayangobi, a unique destination featuring a diverse mix of landscapes, including sand dunes, forests, and rocky mountains. Along the way, we'll have opportunities to hike the smaller sand dunes and ride camels. We'll also stop to witness the exciting Naadam horse racing.

In the afternoon, we'll visit Erdene Khambyn Khuree, located 20 km from the camp, nestled in the majestic Khugnu Khaan Mountain. This monastery was founded by the enlightened Bogd Gegeen Zanabazar, a religious leader, philosopher, artist, and sculptor, who established the Uvgun and Zaluu temples for his spiritual teacher. In 1688, the monasteries were destroyed by soldiers under the Oirad nobleman Galdan Boshigt, who also assassinated the monks.

We'll have the opportunity to visit a horse-breeding family and experience the traditional making of airag, a Mongolian drink made from mare's milk. Additionally, for those who want, there will be the chance to ride horses using traditional Mongolian wooden saddles.

Overnight in Bayangobi **Meals: B-L-D**

Horses are deeply woven into the fabric of Mongolian culture, history, and livelihood, symbolizing **freedom**, **strength**, and the **spirit** of the Mongolian people.

For thousands of years, Mongolian nomads have relied on horses for transportation, herding, and as **invaluable partners** in everyday life across the vast steppes. Horses played a central role in Genghis Khan's empire, enabling Mongolian warriors to cover incredible distances swiftly and form one of the world's **most powerful empires**.

Today, horse breeding remains an essential part of the Mongolian economy and rural life, with herders raising the hardy, agile Mongolian horses renowned for their endurance in harsh climates. Horses are celebrated each year during the **Naadam Festival**, where traditional horse racing honors the deep-rooted bond between Mongolians and their horses.

Beyond economics, horses hold **cultural significance** in songs, poetry, and rituals, embodying the nomadic spirit that defines Mongolia's heritage and identity





Day 10: Thu, July 9 **Kharkhorin - Erdenezuu Monastery**

In the morning, we'll drive to Shankh Monastery, the oldest monastery in Mongolia, founded in 1647 by Zanabazar, a revered sculptor, politician, religious teacher, diplomat, and living Buddha, who became Mongolia's first Bogd Khaan. Known as the West Monastery, it was one of the most prominent centers of Buddhist teaching and practice in the country for nearly three centuries.

Shankh Monastery housed several schools focused on Tantric rituals, philosophy, and astrology. In 1937, the monastery was closed, its temples burned, and many monks were executed or sent to labor camps in Siberia.

In the afternoon, we'll explore the ancient capital, including a visit to the Erdenezuu Monastery and the Kharkhorin Museum. If time permits, we'll make a brief stop at the local market. We'll return to the camp for an overnight stay.

Overnight in Bayangobi **Meals: B-L-D**

Kharkhorin, the **ancient capital** of the Mongol Empire, holds a significant place in Mongolia's history.

Established by **Genghis Khan** in 1220, it served as a strategic hub along the Silk Road, linking East and West. Under the rule of Genghis Khan's son, Ögedei, Kharkhorin became a thriving metropolis, filled with **palaces**, **temples**, and bustling **markets** that welcomed traders, diplomats, and artisans from around the world. The city was a **symbol of Mongolian power** and a center for **cultural exchange**, where ideas and goods flowed freely. However, by the late 14th century, Kharkhorin was largely destroyed during conflicts with the Ming Dynasty, leading to its decline.

Today, visitors can explore the remnants of this **historic city**, including the impressive Erdene Zuu Monastery, built in the 16th century using stones from Kharkhorin's ruins, preserving the spirit of Mongolia's ancient capital and its **legacy** as a crossroads of civilizations.

Day 11: Fri, July 10 **Khustai NP - Ulaanbaatar**

After an early breakfast, we'll begin our day trip to Khustai National Park.

Along the way, we'll explore the forest and steppe landscapes, enjoying the cool temperatures and the sight of many wild birds and flowers. Upon arrival at the park, we'll have lunch at the camp.

Khustai National Park lies in the foothills of the southern Khentii Mountain range and is home to the wild horse known as Takhi, or Przewalski's horse. These horses were successfully reintroduced to their homeland after being extinct for 40 years and now thrive in the wild. The current population of Takhi has exceeded 170.

After our visit, we'll drive back to Ulaanbaatar.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar **Meals: B-L-D**

The **Naadam Festival**, held each July, is Mongolia's **most celebrated event**, showcasing the nation's rich heritage and ancient traditions.

Known as the "**Three Manly Games**," Naadam features competitions in horse racing, wrestling, and archery—sports with roots dating back to the era of Genghis Khan, when they were essential skills for warriors.

Historically, Naadam served both as a way to train soldiers and as a tribute to Mongolia's deities. Over centuries, it evolved from a **tribal celebration** to a national holiday **honoring** Mongolia's **independence** and **culture**.

Today, the festival begins with a grand opening ceremony featuring **vibrant costumes**, **music**, and **parades**. For Mongolians, Naadam represents pride, identity, and resilience, offering visitors a rare glimpse into the enduring spirit and traditions of this remarkable country.



Day 12: Sat, July 11 **Naadam Festival**

Today, we will experience the Naadam Festival, Mongolia's largest annual celebration, highlighting traditional sports such as horse racing, archery, and wrestling.

The festival kicks off with a vibrant, colorful opening ceremony at the Parliament Building. Soldiers in vivid uniforms play traditional instruments and march through the square dressed in Chinggis Khan-era warrior costumes before proceeding to the central stadium.
Throughout the day, we'll watch archery competitions—where targets are placed on the ground —and wrestling matches, unique for having no time limits.

In the evening, enjoy a festive Naadam Gala dinner.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar **Meals: B-L-D**

Day 13: Sun, July 12 **Departure**

Our adventurous journey across Mongolia has come to an end. We will conclude our trip with a transfer to Chinggis Khaan International Airport.





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