



MONGOLIA

NAADAM FESTIVAL & GOBI DESERT

July 05 - July 15, 2024
Led by Professor Norman Jones, Utah State University

Mongolia, a vast Asian nation, boasts a captivating blend of natural wonders and cultural riches. Ulaanbaatar, its capital, offers a dynamic mix of modernity and tradition, with bustling markets, monasteries, and museums. Beyond the city, the Gobi Desert unveils its stark beauty, featuring the Khongor Sand Dunes and the lush oasis of Yol Valley. Mongolia's culture shines through events like the Naadam Opening Ceremony, showcasing wrestling, archery, and the thrilling Naadam Horse Race. The Flaming Cliffs unveil the secrets of a prehistoric world with dinosaur fossils, while Terelj National Park invites exploration of pristine wilderness, forests, and the iconic Turtle Rock. Mongolia, where past meets present amidst breathtaking landscapes and captivating traditions, promises an unforgettable adventure in the heart of the Asian world.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Friday, July 05

Arrive Ulaanbaatar (MONGOLIA)



Upon arrival in **Ulaanbaatar**, the capital and most populated city in Mongolia, meet the local representative and transfer to the *Blue Sky Hotel or similar*, located in the city center, for check-in. Enjoy a welcome dinner with the guide and the group members at a local restaurant offering traditional Mongolian cuisine and then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(D)**

Note: Standard check-in time is 3:00 pm. If you arrive on July 04 or early morning of July 05, an extra hotel night needs to be booked.

Saturday, July 06

Ulaanbaatar (City Tour)



After breakfast, begin the day with a tour of Ulaanbaatar, a city founded in the early 17th century as a nomadic Buddhist Monastic center that contains almost half of the entire country's total population. First, visit **Gandantegchinlen (Gandan) Monastery**, a Tibetan-style Buddhist monastery complex founded in 1809. Comprising of a number of old and new functioning temples, a religious school, and art school, this huge complex was the country's only active monastery from 1944 to 1989. Arrive in time to witness the opening ceremony of religious activities, monks, and pilgrimages. The "Gandan" Monastery's main attraction is the 86 feet **Statue of Avalokitesvara (Megjid Janraiseg)**, the largest indoor statue in the world. Next, explore the **Central Museum of Mongolian Dinosaurs**, opened in 2013 to maintain and promote the cultural heritage of Mongolia and enrich the museum repertoire with the findings of new dinosaur species. The museum contains dinosaur fossils and petrified eggs dating back to 80 million years ago that were found in the Gobi Desert. The main exhibition in the museum is the huge skeleton of **Tarbosaurus Bataar (T-Bataar)**, a close relative of the T-Rex. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant, then head to visit **Sükhbaatar (Chinggis) Square**, one of the highlights of the capital. It is surrounded by government buildings including the **Government Palace** and features an equestrian **statue of Damdin Sükhbaatar** for whom the square is named after. Amid the **Parliament Building** is a **bronze statue of Chinggis Khan**, founder of the nation. While exploring the square, see the local people dressed in traditional dress to celebrate an event such as a college graduation or wedding. The tour ends with a visit to the **National History Museum**, which houses over 50,000

exhibitions from the Stone Age to Contemporary Mongolia offering a good understanding of Mongolia's historical and cultural development during different periods. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, July 07

Ulaanbaatar - Gobi Desert (Yol Valley)



Transfer to the airport in the morning for our flight to the **Gobi Desert**. Upon arrival in **Dalanzadgad**, a provincial town in southern Mongolia, begin the drive to **Yol (Eagle) Valley**, a deep and narrow mountain gorge containing a thick layer of ice throughout most of the year. At the entrance of **Gurvansaikhan National Park**, the largest park in Mongolia home to the argali sheep, snow leopard, and Siberian ibex, stop to visit the **Natural Museum** featuring an exhibit of fauna and flora of this region, as well as samples of minerals found in the Gobi. Continue a short drive to the **Yol Valley** and get the opportunity to explore the most beautiful section of the gorges on foot or by horse. Be on the look-out for the wild animals such as ibex climbing the canyon walls and birds of prey such as vultures and eagles circling above. Transfer to the *Gobi Nomad Lodge* for check-in and have lunch and have some rest. The lodge features deluxe gers with private toilet facilities and has a small **museum** containing rare displays of valuable objects used by the Mongolians during the 19th and 20th centuries. In the afternoon, visit a **nomadic family** for insight into their lifestyle and even try some homemade dairy products such as dried cheese curds, yogurt, or distilled vodka. For those brave enough, try some airag, fermented horse milk that is enjoyed by most Mongolians. The family will also demonstrate how they milk the mares and how they manage their daily life living in a ger. Return to the *Lodge* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, July 08

Gobi Desert (Khongor Sand Dunes)



Spend the day exploring the **Khongor Sand Dunes**, known as the "Singing Dunes." Along the way, see herds of sheep, goats, and bactrian camels, which has two humps and is stockier and shorter than the dromedary. Driving through the Mongolian steppe seems like a never-ending vastness, but there will be stops along the way to learn about the wild onions and flowers that grow in the Gobi. Also, stop at the **"Two Wells"** where nomadic people bring their animals to water and sell a variety of

interesting stones only found in the Mongolian Gobi as well as jewels made from semi-precious stones and ancient tools such as arrowheads. Before reaching the dunes, stop to visit a **camel-herding family** to learn their way of life and even ride a camel through the desert. Walk along the edge of the dunes, or for those fit enough, climb to the top for panoramic desert views. On a windy day, the highest section of the dunes produces the sound similar to an aircraft engine landing or taking off, hence its name, the "Singing Dunes". Time permitting, visit the **Seruun Bulag Oasis (Cold spring)** a lush, green section of the Gobi due to its natural spring. Return to the *Lodge* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, July 09

Gobi Desert (Flaming Cliffs)



After breakfast, begin the drive to the **Flaming Cliffs (Bayanzag)** (approx. 25-miles), one of the richest fossil beds in the world. This important historical site was first excavated by zoologist Roy Chapman in 1922 who discovered the first dinosaur eggs. Since then, many new species of dinosaur species estimated to be between 70,000 and 100,000 years old have been discovered here. The best time to visit the cliffs, which gets its name from their bright orange color, is in the morning or evening when the air temperatures are tolerable. From the top of the cliffs, which can be reached by wooden stairs, there are impressive views of the Gobi. While exploring the cliffs, see the **saxual "Zag" bushes**, a thorny shrub that only grown in the Mongolian Gobi. Local people used it as fuel until the 1980s, but now it is protected. Camels feast on this nutritious plant that contributes to the ecosystem of the Gobi since it prevents desertification. Return to the *Camp* for lunch followed by some leisure time. Along the way, stop at **vegetable farm** where local people grow a variety of vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and watermelon. This is an interesting way to learn how they grow vegetables in harsh climates. Return to the *Lodge* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, July 10

Gobi Desert - Ulaanbaatar (City Tour)



Transfer to the Dalanzadgad Airport in the morning for our flight back to **Ulaanaatar**, Upon arrival begin the drive and head to visit the **Winter Palace** of the last king, located on the south side of the city. Historically, Mongols were ruled by eight religious leaders known as "Bogd Javdandamba" or "Bogd Khaan." The eighth Bogd Khaan, originally from Tibet, played an important role in Mongolia's religious and political history. In 1871 he was identified as a reincarnation of the first Bogd Jivzundamba and sent to Mongolia to become its supreme Buddhist leader. Following the collapse of the Manchu empire in 1911, he became absolute monarch of the newly-independent Mongolian state and continued to rule from the time of the People's Revolution in 1921 until his death in 1924. The palace now serves as a **museum** preserving many of the objects associated with Bogd Khaan and the period of his rule. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant then transfer to *Blue Sky Hotel or similar* for check-in and have

some rest. Later this afternoon, head to visit the newly opened **Chinggis Khaan Museum**, featuring over 10,000 original exhibits from various empires throughout Mongolia's history including the Mongol Empire. Spend some time walking around **Chinggis Square** to see preparations underway for the Naadam Festival and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before returning to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, July 11

Ulaanbaatar (Naadam Opening Ceremony)



A highlight of this tour is the opportunity to witness the spectacular **Naadam Festival**, which takes place at the **Central Stadium** every July 11th, the day Mongolians attained its independence from China. This festival is a big sporting event that kicks off with a spectacular opening ceremony that includes performances from popular singers, musicians, and dancers who represent all the cultural organizations in Mongolia. It is followed by one of Mongolia's three most revered sport - **wrestling**, known as "Bökh." The wrestlers easily stand out in their blue or red colored outfit consisting of a "zodog" (a tight, collarless short-sleeved vest) a "shuudag" (small, tight-fitting briefs), and "guta" (traditional leather boots with slightly upturned toes). While exploring the festivities, witness **archery** and **knuckle shooting** competitions which take place in separate stadiums. After lunch, enjoy a **Cultural Show** to witness traditional folk music, and contortion, a traditional Mongolian art. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, July 12

Ulaanbaatar (Naadam Horse Race)



Horses are a very important part of Mongolians and only the fastest and best horses come from all over Mongolia to compete for the best in the nation. The jockeys are children between the ages of seven and 13 that train with the horse year round, racing in different categories according to their ages. Early this morning, depart for the finish line in order to get a good seat from where to watch the intense finale. While waiting, spend time strolling the arena and enjoy a hot cup of coffee until the riders make an exciting dash for the finish line. The jockeys wear colorful dresses during the racing and sing "Giingoo" to get their horses to go faster. After this exhilarating event, return to the city for lunch, then head back to the *Hotel* for relaxation, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, July 13

Ulaanbaatar - Terelj National Park



After breakfast, begin the drive to the magnificent **Gorkhi-Terelj National Park** (45 mile), a protected area offering spectacular natural scenery. The park's tall mountains covered in forests, meadows filled with wildflowers and bubbling streams make this an ideal location to relax and breathe in the fresh air. Admire its many interesting rock formations named after things they resemble including "**Turtle Rock**" and "**Old Man Reading a Book.**" Wildlife such as boars, deer, fox,

wolves, and birds of prey inhabit the park. Walk about 20-30 minutes up to the **Ariyabal Meditation Temple** from where there are spectacular views. transfer to a *Ger Camp* in the park for check-in and overnight. **(B)**

Sunday, July 14

Terelj National Park - Ulaanbaatar



Begin the morning drive back to **Ulaanbaatar** stopping en route to visit the **Genghis Khan Statue Complex** to see the world's tallest equestrian statue. The complex is located on the banks of the **Tuul River** in an area where Genghis supposedly found a golden whip. The 130 foot tall statue itself is made up of 250 tons of stainless steel. Visitors can climb to the head of the statue for panoramic views of the surrounding area. The complex also has a **museum** featuring exhibits from the Bronze Age and Xiongnu culture as well as displays from the Great Khan period dating back to the 13th century. Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar, head for lunch and then have a chance to do some shopping for some local items such as camel hair and cashmere. Transfer to *Blue Sky Hotel or similar* for check-in and overnight. **(B)**

Monday, July 15

Ulaanbaatar - USA



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

For those doing the Khovsgol Lake extension

Monday, July 15

Ulaanbaatar - Moron - Khovsgol Lake



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for the flight to **Moron**, the center of the Khovsgol Province. Upon arrival begin the drive (approx. 70 mile) to the *Ger Camp* for check-in. The camp is located on the shores of Khovsgol Lake. This pristine lake lies close to the Russian border and is Mongolia's largest freshwater lake. In addition, it is one of 17 ancient lakes in the world. Free afternoon at leisure, dinner and overnight at the *Camp*. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday-Wednesday, July 16-17

Khovsgol Lake



Spend these two days exploring and enjoying the breathtaking scenery around the lake, which is surrounded by several mountain ranges. The area is home to a variety of wildlife including elk, wolf, wolverine, brown bear, Siberian moose, ibex, argali, and sable as well as many predatory birds such as eagles and hawks. This is an excellent place to learn about the nomadic lifestyle and meet the reindeer and yak breeders. There is also ample hiking opportunities along the lake shore and a chance to admire the stunning landscape. Overnight at the *Camp*. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, July 18

Khovsgol Lake - Moron - Ulaanbaatar



After an early breakfast, transfer to Moron Airport for our flight back to **Ulaanbaatar**. Upon arrival, meet and transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, July 19

Ulaanbaatar - USA



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".

Special trip remarks:

- Tourist infrastructure and facilities outside Ulaanbaatar is very limited & often quite primitive.
- Hotels and ger camps may change at the last minute without prior notice due to reasons beyond our control.
- In the more remote areas, gers may be more basic with fewer amenities and possible equipment. Ger camps will have private toilet facilities.
- Air-conditioners in this part of the world do not cool a room or vehicles to American standards of comfort.
- Air-conditioning and heat may not be available at camps outside the city.
- Brownouts or blackouts may occur or there may be limited electricity available.
- This trip involves long drives in dramatic weather conditions over poorly maintained and bumpy roads, especially out in the desert.
- Domestic flights may change without prior notice that may necessitate amending the itinerary.
- There are a lack of modern medical facilities and chronic health problems should be discussed with your physician before joining this tour.
- A high level of flexibility, tolerance, respect, open-mindedness, sense of adventure, and willingness to go with the flow if things change is appreciated while visiting this country.



Tour Cost (Land Only):

7 - 9 travelers \$5,995.00

10 - 12 travelers \$5,495.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$750.00

Khovsgol Lake Extension \$1,995.00

Single supplement \$350.00

Price is based on group size of 6 participants minimum and maximum of 12 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: ***-*****

You tour Lecturer...Professor Norman Jones is Professor Emeritus of History and Religious Studies at Utah State University. Holding a doctorate from Cambridge University, he specializes in the interplay of religion and culture, especially on the cultural fault lines where religions mingle, and identities are shaped through religious allegiances. A specialist in the history of Christianity and Elizabethan England, his publications focus on the early modern world. A popular lecturer, his teaching spans ancient and early modern history. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard University, Oxford University, and the University of Geneva. In 2023 he is the Lord Burghley Visiting Fellow at St. John' College, Cambridge University. Leading tours for



Spiekermann Travel since 2008, he delights in putting things into the "big picture" and providing cultural and historical context for the peoples and places they visit.

Tour Includes:

- Airport / Hotel / Airport transfers.
- Accommodation at 5* hotels mentioned in the city and deluxe camp with private toilet facilities.
- Travel by bus and 4x4 vehicles in the desert.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, Lunch: L, Dinner: D)
- All tours as per itinerary & entrance fees to the sites and museums mentioned.
- Escort of tour leader (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- Domestic flight Ulaanbaatar - Gobi - Ulaanbaatar.
- English -speaking local guide.
- All activities described in the tour.
- Bottled water while on drives.
- Gratuities to guide, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Tour does not include:

- International airfare USA - Ulaan Baatar - USA
- Mongolia Visa, currently not required for US Citizens (subject to change).
- Beverages & alcoholic drinks with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or misconnections.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour manager (optional).
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED).

Trip Grade:

III Challenging - Parts of the trip are physically challenging, involve hiking on rough terrain or in sand or at high altitudes. There may be very long drives on rough roads, weather conditions with high heat or humidity, and the presence of insects. You may have simple picnic lunches, primitive bathroom facilities along the road and remoteness from modern towns or cities.

Lodging Level:

★★ **Basic:** Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but generally with private facilities. Some such lodges and motel-style are in need of repairs, added cleaning, and improvements but they are suitable for one-night stays even if they lack western style amenities. (2 or 3 stars)

★★★★ **Luxury:** Regular style- usually large- hotels, typical western standard with ample venues, and full amenities. (4 or 5 stars)

