ABSOLUTENOMADS
ADVENTURE TRAVEL & TOURS

The Golden Eagle Festival Tour

Mongolia Tour

Overview

On this adventure, we'll cross the vast steppe of Mongolia; traversing mountains and rivers, perilous ravines, and vast open lakes. All in search of Mongolia's most majestic, and elusive creature – the Golden Eagle.

This trip will culminate in a visit to the Golden Eagle Festival in the far west of the country. A celebration where eagle hunters from across the region come together to compete in various challenges; using their magnificent hunting birds to catch artificial bait, dive from incredible heights, and return to their hunters on the mountaintops.

This is really an experience which must be seen to be believed, and an incredible reward for our multi-day expedition across some of the most beautiful landscapes the country, and the world, has to offer.



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What's Included?

Included:

- English Speaking Guide
- Western Tour Leader
- All Listed Meals
- Accommodation
- Internal Flights
- All Included Sightseeing
- All taxes & entrance fees to protected areas

Not Included:

- Single Supplement
- Extra Night(s) Accommodation
- International Flights
- Snacks
- Tips

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Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Golden Eagle Festival Tour** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run-through of each day of the trip.*

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Day 2.	Explore Ulaanbaatar
Day 3.	Mongolia's Wild Horses
Day 4.	The Capital of an Empire
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Day 13.	Return to Ulaanbaatar
Day 14.	Departure Day

Day 1

Arrival Day

Arriving in Ulaanbaatar, you'll have the morning to relax before our exploration of the city centre begins.

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.

We'll then head off for dinner and our pre-tour briefing where we'll explain what you can expect on the adventure ahead!

Accommodation: Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar

Included Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Explore Ulaanbaatar

Before our adventure begins, we'll spend a day in Mongolia's capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

Heading out from our hotel, we'll set out on a relaxing walk down one of the city's many boulevards towards the great Gandan Monastery, the city's main Buddhist centre and home to some beautiful architecture, stunning statues, and hundreds of monks.

Following our experience at the monastery, we'll make our way to Zaisan, an upmarket part of the city home to some more intriguing and interesting sites where we'll climb the huge Soviet tower, the Zaisan Monument, which towers over the district, providing fantastic views over Ulaanbaatar.

After heading down, past the odd statue of a giant Golden Buddha, we'll set out once again into the heart of the city to grab some lunch.

After lunch, we'll make our way to Narantuul Market – a bustling hub for market traders selling everything from solid gold jewellery and silver medallions to bicycle chains and suitcases. We'll spend our afternoon bartering with local traders, buying weird and wonderful objects, and generally enjoying the hustle and bustle of market life in Ulaanbaatar.

The afternoon is free for you to explore Ulaanbaatar at your own pace. For those who wish, we'll make an optional visit to the vast Chinggis Khan Museum near the city centre, housed in a grand marble building.

Finally, we'll regroup for our final group meal in the city before the real adventure begins!

Accommodation: Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Mongolia's Wild Horses

We'll wake up this morning and finally leave the city, heading west through the outskirts and industrial regions before bursting out of the urban centre and out into the wilderness of the Mongolian countryside.

Our destination for today is the famous Hustai National Park, home to the only truly wild horses in the world – known as the Przewalski's Horse, or Takhi Horse.

Arriving in time for lunch, we'll visit the on-site museum and learn about the different animals we'll have the chance to spot whilst in the national park and then head inside for a hearty meal before we leave the visitors centre and venture out in search of wild horses in time for them to head down from the mountains to drink at the river.

These horses are a wonder of conservation as they were once considered near-extinct before being protected in Hustai National Park where they have truly begun to thrive.

After an afternoon of horse-related safari, we'll return to our accommodation near the entrance of the park for a delicious dinner as we watch the sunset over the mountainous peaks and head to bed in our traditional Mongolian gers.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

The Capital of an Empire

This morning we'll wave goodbye to Hustai National Park and continue west, making our way towards the ancient city of Kharkorum.

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

During Kharkorum'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 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: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Ancient Capitals 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. Kharkorum 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: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

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 get to our overnight stop for tonight, located in the midst of Mongolia's picturesque scenery.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

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 out to our next local ger camp.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

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, Khovd

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Discover the Remote City of Khovd

This morning we'll wake up in the remote city of Khovd, capital of Khovd Aimag in the far west of Mongolia.

After our incredible expedition across Mongolia, we'll take a day to relax and spending some time exploring this fascinating city, beginning with a later than usual start before heading out to Khovd Market – a small market made up small brick and concrete buildings mixed with covered market stalls and other temporary stands selling everything from clothes and hats to odd souvenirs and old russian knives – a real adventure for any shopaholics amongst you!

After enjoying lunch, we'll make our way to the local Buddhist Temple to explore this beautiful example of a more local temple, and perhaps meet some local monks.

To contrast the religions which dominate the Mongolian countryside, we'll leave the city in search of a shaman. Shamanism is an important belief system across Mongolia, and so we'll venture out to find a practioner for ourselves and get a taste of how these spiritual healers operate.

After returning to the city, we'll head to a beautiful spot nearby to enjoy some traditional Mongolian throat singing before enjoying our dinner and heading to bed in preparation the day ahead.

Accommodation: Steppe Hotel, Khovd

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Drive to Bayan-Ulgii & Visit Eagle Hunters

This morning we're up and out early as we make our way north towards the city of Bayan-Ulgii, the site of the forthcoming eagle festival. However, we'll arrive a day early in order to get settled, and meet one of these majestic hunting birds, and it's owner, close-up before we see him perform the following days.

Our drive between Khovd and Ulgii will give us a chance to see some of the most stunning natural beauty in the whole of Mongolia, from steppe, to rugged hills, and finally into the craggy mountainous peaks and distant snow-capped mountains that define the landscape in this part of Mongolia.

Enroute, we'll stop at the beautiful crystalline waters of Tolbo lake for a chance to strech our legs and take photos, after which we'll pay a visit to a local nomadic eagle hunting family to learn a little more about the culture surrouding these eagle hunters, and how they train their beautiful birds.

Upon arrival in the city, we will visit the local Ulgii Eagle Hunting Museum to learn about the festival which awaits us in the days ahead, and also stop by the Ulgii market for a chance to peruse some of the various Kazakh goods on sale – from hats and musical instruments to, perhaps if we're lucky, some eagle hunting paraphanelia.

After the market, we'll make our way to our get camp which overlooks the city and the surrounding mountains before having dinner and getting some sleep as we prepare for an action packed day tomorrow as the Eagle Festival begins.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Eagle Festival Day 1

We'll leave our camp early and head over to the site of the Eagle Festival where we'll locate the food tents and explore some of the other oddities of the festival area as the various eagle hunters and spectators arrive.

As we wait for things to kick off, we'll be able to check out the local souvenir shops and local traders who travel from far and wide to sell art, antiques, and other intruiging handmade crafts to the festival-goers.

As we wander around this beautiful, busy, bustling area, we'll slowly make our way towards the main arena where we'll catch the opening ceremony. Eagle hunters from Mongolia, as well as nearby Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will ride on horseback at speed carrying their eagles and showing off their magnificant costumes as they celebrate the beginning of this annual festival.

As the day continues, we'll see a series of exciting activities beginning with a display in which eagle hunters will call their eagles from the nearby mountain peak and the birds will dive at incredible speeds to land with their owner. For the adventurous amongst you, you may wish to climb the mountains along with the eagles and their handlers to watch the birds rise from the mountaintop and dive to the arena down below you. This makes for some incredible photos!

After the day's festivities have ended we'll return to camp for a chance to shower, perhaps have a drink or two, and watch the sun set.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Eagle Festival Day 2

We're back at the festival again today, watching the eagles perform.

Today, the main event will be a performance in which the eagle must swoop down from the mountain to the ground where the hunter must drag an artificial lure along the ground which the eagle must swoop down to catch – a great chance to watch the eagles in action.

As the day continues, we'll experience some more bizarre celebrations. From Kazakh husbands and wives chasing eachother on horseback, to two burly Kazakh men horseback wrestling.

We'll also get the chance to see a camel beauty contest, something which I'm sure you've all seen many times before, and finally the closing ceremony in which the hunters will ride with their eagles and provide us a great chance to get closer to the hunters and take some fantastic photos of the participants in all their finery.

As the event closes, we'll make our way to a local musician's family yurt to meet a Kazakh folk band who will perform traditional music for us after we've enjoyed a hearty traditional Kazakh meal.

Accommodation: Local Ger Camp

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13

Return to Ulaanbaatar

This morning we'll depart the city and head out to the airport, waving goodbye to the majestic scenery of western Mongolia as we head back to the hustle and bustle of Ulaanbaatar.

Upon arrival, we'll return to the hotel where you'll have the option to enjoy a free afternoon in the city or, for those still yearning for beautiful scenery and more adventure in the Mongolian countryside, we can take you out to the Bogd Khan Mountain National Park where we'll enjoy a hike through the alpine hillsides of the Bogd Khan Mountain and enjoying the fantastic views over the city.

Alternatively, should you wish to spend your free time in the city, your tour leader will gladly point you in the direction of anything you might want to do; picking up camel wool socks in the market, finding bargains in the State Department Store, or exploring any of the temples and palaces around the city.

That evening, we'll regroup for a farewell dinner as we remenisce about our expedition. Our choice of restaurant tonight will be the Mongolian Barbeque Grill where we'll enjoy a delicious final meal together.

Accommodation: Hotel 9, Ulaanbaatar

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Departure Day

This morning, we'll transfer you to the airport, whatever time your flight, and bid you goodbye as you leave Mongolia, hopefully leaving with a head full of memories and a bag full of souvenirs!

END OF TOUR

Included Meals: Breakfast