TOUR CODE

MN1

ADVENTURESABROAD

MONGOLIA

featuring the Nadaam Festival

16 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 ***Arrival in Ulaanbaatar***

Today we arrive in Ulaanbaatar and transfer to our hotel.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are booking this tour early (ie, 8 months to one year or more) please be advised that our published dates are TENTATIVE. Due to shifting Nadaam Festival dates, internal flight schedules, accommodation availability, and other considerations, we will be firming up dates around January of each year (6 months prior) to departure.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Ulaanbaatar - Hogno Khan Uul Nature Reserve***

We depart this morning for a drive to the steppes of Harhorin (Karakorum).

There will be steppe landscape all the way, and upon reaching the Hogno Khan Uul Nature Reserve we will see Mongol Els sand dunes in the middle of the steppes. They are locally known as "Little Gobi" and next to them there is a very small lake where waders such as herons and ducks may be seen. Transfer from the main road to our ger camp tucked away in a secluded valley at Hogno Khan Mountain.

We spend our first night in a traditional 'ger'.* Gers are the movable domed structures used by nomads for centuries. Made of a latticed wood structure covered with layers of felt and canvas, each ger is heated by a wood stove and furnished with comfortable wood-framed beds. The traditional ger has a lattice-work frame of narrow birch and willow boards held together by leather strips. Traditionally, the "door" consisted of a felt curtain over the door-frame; this is now replaced with a carved or painted wooden door. The entrance of the ger always faces south because the winds usually blow from the northeast.

Though basic, gers allow us to visit areas that lack travellers' accommodations, and most visitors find their stays at ger camps to be among the most enjoyable experiences in Mongolia. The camps have a maximum capacity of about 20 guests in double occupancy gers that are fully collapsible, and most have shower and WC blocks. The toilets are long drop style allowing for natural decomposition. Showers can be organized in the outdoors with hot water by portable showers and a shower tent that is provided. Personal water basins for washing are provided and water always kept topped up. A stove is placed in the middle of each ger and the staff will attend to it in order to provide warmth on cool nights. Towels are provided. Soft drinks, wine and bottled water are all available for purchase from the camps.

* Single gers are NOT available. Single supplements reflect sharing in gers and single rooms in hotels in cities.

Overnight at Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 3 ***Hogno Khan & Harhorin***

Full day excursion in this fascinating area. We will drive approx 2 hours / 80 km on the recently refurbished road to Harhorin. We visit Erdenezuu Hiid, a functioning monastery in constant renovation to its former splendour.

This is one of the historically and archeologically richest places in Central Asia. Once, 1000 monks used to inhabit Erdenezuu. Built in 1586, it was constructed from the ruins of the buildings that had once made up the city of Harhorin. The architecture exemplifies the skill of Mongolia's master builders, and is even complete with an ancient freshwater supply system from the nearby Orkhon River. It had some 100 temples within its 400 by 400 meters long walls. The monastery was sacked during the purges of 1937 and only the walls and 3 temples remain. Erdenezuu is still one of the most fascinating sites of Mongolia, and usually we will be able to witness the prayers.

Return to Hogno Khan.

Overnight at Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Hogno Khan Area*

Today is free for optional activities.

The Hogno Khan Mountain is a giant rock formation in the middle of the steppes. The small Erdene Khombo monastery, which can be reached by bus or on foot, is now being restored. It was destroyed during the purges of the 1930s. This is an interesting area where many nomadic herdsmen and women live. We can do some day walks into these areas, visit some nomadic families, do some horse riding, or vehicle-supported trips at additional cost.

Overnight at Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Hogno Khan - Ulaanbaatar*

We drive back to the capital and have the evening at leisure.

At some point during our tour, we will have a panoramic tour of the capital, including the national Museum and Natural History Museums.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 6 *Ulaanbaatar - South Gobi Desert*

We transfer to the airport for our flight south to Dalanzadgad, gateway to the Gobi region, not far from the Chinese border.

Many visitors regard the Gobi as a remote, exotic and mystical place. While it is some of those things, it is also mainly grass, shrubs and rocks. Oases and sand cover only about 3% of the desert. It is, however, a land of extremes and can be well over 40C (105 F) during summer and below -40C (-40 F) in winter. Sand and dust storms can be fearsome in spring. The word Gobi refers to a shallow, wide basin.

We travel to the Yol Valley in the Gurvansaikhan National Park. This park is rich in dinosaur fossils, extraordinary sand dunes, rock formations and a gorge so narrow and deep that the ice within it lasts for most of the year. The surprisingly green park is cradled between the peaks of the Altai Mountains and home to over 200 species of birds, including the

Mongolian Desert Finch, Cinerous Vulture, Desert Warbler and the Houbara Bustard. The sparse vegetation manages to support black-tailed gazelle, snow leopard, ibex, argali sheep and endangered species of wild camel.

NOTE: The order of Gobi area sightseeing may vary depending on local flight times and other consideraitons.

Overnight at Gobi Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 7 *South Gobi: Bayanzag & Hongor Sands*

We drive west to see the dunes of the Gobi Desert and spend a night near the dunes. A full-day drive will bring us to the famous Hongor Sands, a giant sand dune stretching lengthwise some 180 km / 112 mi away in the distance. Sometimes it is just a couple of hundred meters wide, sometimes as wide as 7-20 km. We also stop at Bayanzag (Flaming Cliffs) where a large number of dinosaur fossils have been found. The bright red sandstones of the Djadokhta rock formation contain Protoceratops fossils, dinosaur eggs, prehistoric mammals and even hadrosaurs. In the setting sun these sandstone cliffs are tinged a bright orange / red colour, hence their name.

Overnight at Gobi Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 8 *South Gobi: to Yol Valley*

Today is a full day of travel to the Yol Valley area with a picnic lunch en route.

Overnight at Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9 *Yol Valley*

A full day excursion into the core of the Gurvansaikhan Mountains and the Yol Valley itself. We will explore this famous ravine, which sometimes has permanent ice and snow. Lammergeier nest here, and we are almost guaranteed to see them flying over the ravine. Another rare bird, the Wallcreeper (Tichodroma muraria), is also quite easy to see at close range. When the ice and snow are solid or completely thawed, it is possible to take a long hike through the entire length of the Yol Valley back to our ger camp.

Overnight at Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Gobi Desert - Ulaanbaatar*

Depending on the timing of today's flight time, we may spend some time this morning continuing our visit to the Yol Valley, including the local museum.

Fly back to Ulaanbaatar.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 *Ulaanbaatar: Naadam Festival*

With UB as our base, we'll experience the Naadam Festival.* The Naadam Festival, or "eriyn gurvan naadam," is the biggest Festival of the year for Mongolians. Occurring in July, it runs for three days in all parts of the country and highlights the greatest athletes in horse racing, archery, and wrestling: Mongolia's most popular sports. Women participate in all but the wrestling category. The word Naadam means game or competition in Mongolian.

This morning we drive to "Naadam Camp" in the steppes at Hui Doloon Hudag some 50-60km outside the city to the west. Naadam horse racing participants from all the provinces of Mongolia organise the camp and horse races in the area. The jockeys average between six and nine years old! The atmosphere is electric and there is always plenty to watch. The largest Naadam is held in / near Ulaanbaatar every year along with other celebrations. Riotous in comparison with the Mongolian landscape, the wrestling, racing and archery make for an exciting few days, and an opportunity to experience one of Mongolia's rarest events -- crowds of people!

* NOTE: Those of you who like to research your trip far in advance, please be advised that the order of our overnight points changes every year, and the placement of the Naadam Festival in our program usually changes every year. You may also find if you are researching well in advance that this itinerary is in variance with the dates for next year's festival; do not be alarmed. Approximately 6 months out, we re-work our itinerary and possibly shift our dates to ensure that we are in UB for the festival dates.

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Ulaanbaatar: Naadam Festival*

Today we witness the opening ceremony at the Central Stadium. If we have not been able to view archery yesterday, this will take place after a picnic lunch at the stadium grounds. The Mongolian President and members of government will be at the opening ceremonies, usually followed by wrestling.

NOTE: It is important to note that the games do not really operate on a strict schedule, but rather on a fluid basis that sometimes seems to be made up as they go along. Your local guide will have their "ear to the ground," however, and will be able to tailor our overall Naadam experience to maximize interest, though our days here may seem a little "on-the-fly."

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 13 *Ulaanbaatar - Ganden Monastery - Jalman Meadows*

This morning we drive from Ulaanbaatar to Jalman Meadows.

En route we visit Ganden Monastery, the seat of Buddhism in Mongolia. Most of the temples and monasteries, along with their belongings were destroyed during the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. Gandantegchinlen Khiid survived because the communists kept it as a showcase to impress foreigners. Roughly meaning 'the great place of complete joy', Gandan is one of Ulanbataar's most amazing sights. Within it are several glorious temples adorned with gold and jewels. The 150 resident monks make the temples lively with plenty of chanting and ceremonies.

In the uppermost parts of the Tuul River Valley is Jalman Mountain and Jalman Meadows. It is a huge meadow along the Tuul River with a lot of wildflowers in the summer. It is located within the Khan Khentii Strictly Protected Area, Mongolia's only true wilderness area, extending all the way to the Russian-Siberian frontier. We stay in a ger camp located next to the Tuul River and Jalman Meadows.

The first part of our route consists of driving on the tarmac road towards Baganuur. We drive out of the cityscape and

enter a region of treeless steppe after which we switch to jeep tracks and drive for an hour through a steppe valley devoid of any telegraph poles and inhabited by numerous herdsmen with their livestock. The last part of our journey is through patches of larch and birch forests up the Tuul River Valley.

Overnight in Jalman Meadows Ger Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 14 *Jalman Meadows*

We have the day to explore the Jalman Meadows.

The area is in the transition zone of steppes and taiga forests in the uppermost parts of the Tuul River Valley, a mere full day's ride from where the river originate. Hence, there are steppe valleys, meadows along the Tuul River, larch forests with patches of birch. Wildlife such as wolf, lynx, brown bear, red deer, gazelle, moose, wild boar are certainly present but hard to see during the summer. Jalman Meadows is located in the autumn and winter pastures of nomadic herders of Erdene soum. A few remain, but most families vacate the area with their animals to allow for good seasonal pasture.

Possible activities today include day hikes and swimming. The Tuul River is in its most pristine here and is next to the camp. The water may be cold, but usually pleasant during parts of July and August. The river is crystal clear and transparent, with regular deep pools. Horse riding: Hourly, half days and full day rides can be organized with local horsemen (extra charge USD 35 per person full day. USD 15 per half day. USD 7-8 one hour). You might also enquire about a gentle rafting trip on the Tuul River. Or you could relax and take advantage of the camp's library resources.

Overnight in a ger camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 15 *Jalman Meadows - Ulaanbaatar*

Today we return by road to Ulaanbaatar with the balance of the afternoon free.

This evening you might attend an optional Tumen Ekh folk concert (USD 10 per person including transport).

Overnight in Ulaanbaatar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Departure*

Departure from Ulaanbaatar.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.