

Dinosaur Cliffs by Day, Nomad Gers by Night

A 9-Day Mongolia Itinerary

Mongolia in nine days: a night in Ulaanbaatar before flying into the Gobi Desert to hike a glacier-carved gorge, ride camels across 300-meter singing sand dunes, and walk a cliffside dinosaur fossil site, then a long overland loop north through an ancient Mongol capital and back to the grassy valleys of Gorkhi-Terelj National Park — with real ger camps, a real tour operator, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION

9 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

June to September (Short Travel Season)

Mongolia's roads and ger camps are only reliably open June through September. July brings the Naadam Festival (wrestling, archery, horse racing) around July 11-13 and the greenest steppe; June and September are quieter and cooler, with fewer other travelers on the Gobi tracks. Winters are brutally cold and most rural camps close entirely.

FROM

\$2,450 USD / person

for 2 people, incl. ger camps, hotels, a domestic flight, guide, driver and vehicle

Day 1

Arrive in Ulaanbaatar

Land in Mongolia's capital, settle in for the only two-night hotel stay of the trip, and spend the afternoon at the city's central square and its busiest Buddhist monastery before a Mongolian barbecue dinner.

Airport Transfer — Ulaanbaatar

~30 minutes • From \$20 USD, private car for 2

A private transfer from Chinggis Khaan International Airport (ULN) into central Ulaanbaatar, past Soviet-era apartment blocks and ger districts climbing the hillsides on the edge of the city.

Sukhbaatar Square & Gandantegchinlen Monastery

~3 hours, guided • \$40 USD / person

A licensed guide walks the granite expanse of Sukhbaatar Square beneath the seated Chinggis Khaan statue, then crosses town to Gandantegchinlen Monastery, Mongolia's largest active Buddhist monastery, where a 26-meter gilded statue of Migjid Janraisig towers over robed monks in prayer.

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Check-In — Shangri-La Hotel Ulaanbaatar

From \$195 USD / night, for 2 people

A five-star tower on Olympic Street in the Sukhbaatar District, with floor-to-ceiling city views, an indoor pool and spa, and the most reliable base in the capital for the trip's bookend nights.

Shangri-La Hotel Ulaanbaatar · +97677029999 · www.shangri-la.com/ulaanbaatar/shangrila

Welcome Dinner — Modern Nomads Restaurant

~1.5 hours · \$15-25 USD / person

A Ulaanbaatar institution serving Mongolian khorkhog (meat slow-cooked with hot stones) and buuz dumplings in a dining room decorated with nomadic textiles and saddle-leather furniture.

Day 2

Fly to the Gobi & Hike Yolyn Am Gorge

A short domestic flight trades a full day of driving for a look at the Gobi's flat gravel plains from the air, landing in time for an afternoon hike through a narrow gorge that holds ice into summer.

Domestic Flight — Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad

~1.5 hours · From \$95 USD / person, one-way

A morning flight south over the gravel plains of the Gobi to Dalanzadgad, gateway to Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, where a private driver and guide meet the flight.

MIAT Mongolian Airlines · www.miat.com

Guided Hike — Yolyn Am (Vulture Valley)

~2.5 hours, guided · \$8 USD / person, park entry included

A walk into a narrow limestone gorge in Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park that holds a ribbon of glacier ice well into summer most years, framed by cliffs where lammergeier vultures nest.

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Overnight — Three Camel Lodge

From \$520 USD / night, for 2 people, all-inclusive meals

Mongolia's best-known eco-luxury camp, built from traditional gers with en-suite bathrooms and solar power on a private stretch of the Gobi near Bulgan, run by a family that has hosted travelers here since 2002.

Three Camel Lodge · 97611325786 · www.threecamellodge.com

Day 3

Khongoryn Els Singing Dunes

A drive deeper into the Gobi to Mongolia's tallest sand dune system, where camel handlers lead treks across the ridges and the sand itself is said to hum in the wind.

Camel Trek — Khongoryn Els Singing Dunes

~2 hours, guided · \$25 USD / person

Two-humped Bactrian camels, led by local herder families, carry riders along the base of Khongoryn Els — a 180-kilometer dune belt rising up to 300 meters, among the tallest in Asia.

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Sunset Dune Climb

~1 hour, self-guided · Free

A steep barefoot climb up the dune face for sunset, when the sand supposedly 'sings' as wind moves grains across the ridgeline — best heard from the crest looking back over the Gobi's gravel plains.

Overnight — Gobi Erdene Ger Camp

From \$85 USD / night, for 2 people

A traditional ger camp at the foot of the dunes with beds, a wood stove for cool desert nights, and a dining ger serving home-style Mongolian meals — booked as part of the guided route.

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Day 4

Bayanzag Flaming Cliffs & Ongi Monastery

A morning at the red sandstone cliffs where the first dinosaur eggs ever recorded were found, then a long drive north to the ruins of a monastery leveled in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

Guided Walk — Bayanzag Flaming Cliffs

~1.5 hours, guided · \$10 USD / person

Eroded red sandstone outcrops that glow orange at sunset, made famous by the 1920s Roy Chapman Andrews expeditions that found the first confirmed dinosaur eggs here — fossil fragments still occasionally surface after rain.

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Drive — Bayanzag to Ongi Monastery

~3.5 hours, private vehicle · Included with guided route

A long, unpaved drive north across open Gobi steppe, past herds of goats and the occasional nomadic ger, toward the Ongi River valley.

Overnight — Secret of Ongi Ger Camp

From \$75 USD / night, for 2 people

A small riverside ger camp beside the ruins of Ongi Monastery, once home to over 1,000 monks before its destruction in 1939 — now two shells of temple walls on opposite riverbanks.

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Horseback Ride — Elsen Tasarkhai Dunes

~1.5 hours, guided · \$20 USD / person

A gentler morning ride on sturdy Mongolian horses across grass-fringed dunes with the granite outcrops of Khogno Khan Uul rising behind — the same breed of horse Chinggis Khaan's cavalry rode across this landscape.

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Drive — Elsen Tasarkhai to Ulaanbaatar

~4.5 hours, private vehicle · Included with guided route

A paved return drive across open steppe and the Khustain Nuruu foothills, the same road roaming herds of Przewalski's wild horses sometimes cross at dusk.

Evening Show — Tumen Ekh Ensemble

~1 hour, evening show · \$15 USD / person

A folk ensemble performance of throat singing (khoomii), the two-string morin khuur horsehead fiddle, and contortion acts in a small Ulaanbaatar theater — a fast introduction to the music behind the last six days on the steppe.

Overnight — Shangri-La Hotel Ulaanbaatar

From \$195 USD / night, for 2 people

Back to the same five-star base in Sukhbaatar District for a hot shower and a proper bed after five nights in gers.

Shangri-La Hotel Ulaanbaatar · +97677029999 · www.shangri-la.com/ulaanbaatar/shangrila

Day 7

Gorkhi-Terelj National Park

A short drive out of the city to a national park of granite spires and pine forest, closing out the trip's wild landscapes with a hike to a cliffside meditation temple.

Drive — Ulaanbaatar to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park

~1.5 hours, private vehicle · Included with guided route

An easy paved drive northeast out of Ulaanbaatar into a landscape of granite boulders, pine-covered ridges, and the Tuul River valley.

Turtle Rock & Aryabal Meditation Temple Hike

~2.5 hours, guided · \$5 USD / person, entry included

A short stop at Turtle Rock, a granite boulder eroded into an unmistakable turtle shape, followed by a wooden staircase climb through pine forest to Aryabal Meditation Temple, a small monastery built into the cliffside above the valley.

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Overnight — Terelj Hotel

From \$110 USD / night, for 2 people

A lodge of wood cabins and heated ger-style rooms set among pine trees inside Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, with a restaurant looking out over the Tuul River valley.

Terelj Hotel · www.tereljhotel.mn

Departure Transfer — Chinggis Khaan International Airport

~30 minutes · From \$20 USD, private car for 2

A final private transfer from central Ulaanbaatar to Chinggis Khaan International Airport for onward international connections, closing a nine-day loop from the capital's monasteries to the Gobi's dunes and cliffs and back to the pine valleys of Terelj.