

# Horse Riding Holiday in Mongolia



## Highlights

**Rising high in the Khangai Mountains, the Orkhon River Valley is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the cradle of Mongolia's nomadic culture! Spend five days horse riding in Mongolia, following the course of the river as it flows past sacred caves, ancient ruins and high mountain monasteries!**

From the mighty Altai Mountains to the sweeping sandscapes of the Gobi desert, Mongolia is a land of spectacular diversity! Marshes, salt lakes, forests and glaciers lie side by side with rolling pastures and wind-carved dunes, home to wild horses, Corsac foxes and the legendary Bactrian camel. One of the 20 largest countries in the world, Mongolia is also one of the most sparsely populated. Over a third of the country's three million inhabitants live in the capital Ulaanbaatar, while another third is engaged in nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism, a livelihood strategy unchanged in centuries. Thanks to its size and geographic isolation, Mongolia retains a truly unique cultural heritage, with indigenous forms of wrestling, horse-racing and throat-singing among the many ancient pastimes still practised today.

This horseback expedition is an adventure without parallel, a unique opportunity to explore this magical landscape in true Mongolian style! Your journey begins in the small city of Darkan, where you'll have the chance to visit the museum and get some background information on the region and its inhabitants. You'll then head out into the countryside, swapping your jeep for a horse as you near the mighty Orkhon! The valley walls are dotted with ancient temples, ruined monasteries and caves used for meditation – ideal trekking sites - while the river itself is perfect for swimming! Each evening you'll stay with a local family in their traditional ger, offering a unique insight into the timeless traditions of this remote steppes region. As well as enjoying some authentic home cooking, you'll have the chance to partake in a host of household activities, from milking the animals to playing shagai (a marbles-like game played with an old ankle bone)!

## Is it for me?

Even by our own high standards, these Mongolia tours are that little bit special! This is a serious adventure, closer in kind to explorations of old than to the well-trodden trails of the modern traveller. There's an endless stream of unique experiences, from milking a mare to kipping in a ger, so these tours are best suited to adventurous types with wide-open minds (the kind of people who wouldn't say no to trying a horse steak, perhaps!?).

The riding itself is fairly leisurely so no prior experience is necessary, though a decent level of physical fitness is desirable. You will be riding about 12 kms per day which will be about 2-3 hours. Do bear in mind that traditionally Mongolian saddles are made out of wood. Whilst, for the purposes of these trips, the saddles are covered in felt to increase comfort, they may not be as comfortable as the saddles you might use at home. You'll get most from this trip if you're not afraid to try new things and even look silly in the process – we find that's the best way to make friends! Put yourself out there and you'll be rewarded with sites and insights that most folk can only dream of!

## Accommodation

This tour begins with one night at Raja's Guest House in Darkan, followed by three nights spent with Mongolian families in their traditional gers (sometimes known as yurts), circular felt-covered tents used by nomads throughout Central Asia. These wood-framed dwellings are carefully designed to protect inhabitants from the elements; whatever the weather outside, the ger remains warm and cosy within! You'll have cushions and

Prices from

**241** GBP (5 days) per person

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blankets galore, and some stops have hot showers and laundry facilities on site. All meals are taken with the host families, offering a unique introduction to traditional Mongolian food. Standard fare includes meaty dumplings, noodle soups, hearty stews and sweet boortsog (a popular biscuit). You'll also have the chance to sample (and possibly prepare) some airag, the national drink made from fermented mare's milk!

## Itinerary

### Day 1: Darhan city tour:

You will leave from UB by local coach at 11:00 a.m. and will arrive in Darkhan city at 3:00 p.m. Upon arrival, your guide will take you to Raja's Curry House by local taxi and you will have your set lunch at the curry house. Later in the afternoon you will have a short walking tour of the city, visiting the Museum, the Youth Theatre, the Mongolia Park, the Buddha's Statue, the Morin Khuur (horse-headed fiddle) complex and the Mongolian first hanging bridge. Later in the evening you will have a nice curry with parata (Indian pancake) and salads at Raja's Curry House. While you are having your dinner, you will be entertained with local cultural performances such as khuumi (faucets), chanting with horse-headed fiddle and contortionist acrobatics by a professional Darkhan artist and their students. You will spend the night at the Raja's Guest House.

### Day 2: Horse back ride and visits to Ruins of Kharaa Dari Ekh Monastery:

After having breakfast around 9:00 a.m., you will depart to the first herder family by car or minibus (38km). When you reach Mr. B. Tumurbaatar's ger, you will enjoy a packed lunch from Asian Kitchen. In the afternoon you will go for a short horse back ride (12km) with the herder family along the beautiful Orkhon River to visit the ruin of Kharaa Dari Ekh Monastery. Kharaa Dari Ekh Monastery was built in front of Suvraga Hill in the Durs pine forest of Kharaa River in the 1800s. You will have a packed dinner and camp near the Monastery.

### Day 3: Nomadic Cultural activities and visits to Meditation Caves:

After breakfast near the camp site, you will travel back by horse the host family's ger. Upon arrival you will enjoy a nomad-style lunch and then you'll have the opportunity to milk a cow, play Shagai, the traditional ankle bone game, learn how to wrestle and help in the vegetable fields. In the late afternoon you will travel by car for 16 kilometers round trip along the beautiful Orkhon River to visit two meditation caves of Dari Ekh Monastery. It is said that in ancient times when the monks decided to establish the temple they sent a special team to choose the right place depending on the natural environment, river and forest. You can use your time to meditate in this cave and then in late evening you will make the trip back to the host family. You will have dinner with the herder family and spend the night in their large tent.

### Day 4: Trip to second and third herder family and swim in the Orkhon River:

After breakfast, the herder will guide you to the second herder family by horse cart (12km). En route you will pass by "Snake Mountain", a hill region once renowned for its snakes! You also may come across a few ancient graves along the road. Once you reach Mr. Attarsuren's ger, you will be served with hot tea and lunch. After a short rest you will get to know the family and have the opportunity for a good walk on the beautiful greenery. It's then on to the third herder family (Mr. Nyamchuluun's), where you will have tea and cookies before an optional swim in the Orkhon River. You'll spend the evening with Nyamchuluun and his family in their tent.

### Day 5: Return to Darhan

After the breakfast, your driver will pick you up by car and then you will reach Darkhan by noon for a nice Indian lunch. Your guide will take you to visit few handicraft- and souvenir-making family groups to see how they use the local raw materials to produce finish products. Later in the afternoon you will take the coach back to Ulaanbaatar.

## Details

### Getting there

You will need to catch a bus from Ulaanbaatar to Darhan - about a 4 hour journey.

### Price includes

Food, accommodation, activities, some transfers

### Price details

From \$368 per person

Includes:

UB to Darkhan & return Bus Fee

Transfer to first ger and pickup

Booking & Travel Orientation w/ handbook

### Available

Jun—Oct

### Typical Duration

5 days

### Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

### Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

