

# Mongolia – The Best of the Gobi Desert

## Naturetrek Itinerary



*The Bayanzag Cliffs (Flaming Cliffs)*

### Outline Itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly from Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad, transfer to Yolyn Am
<b>Day 2</b>	Birdwatching and exploring around Yolyn Am
<b>Day 3</b>	Transfer to Khongoryn Els (Singing Dunes)
<b>Day 4</b>	Full day exploring Khongoryn Els
<b>Day 5</b>	Transfer to Bayanzag (Flaming Cliffs)
<b>Day 6</b>	Full day exploring Bayanzag and Saxaul Forest
<b>Day 7</b>	Return transfer to Dalanzadgad
<b>Day 8</b>	Return flight to Ulaanbaatar

## Summary

The Gobi Desert is one of the largest and most unique deserts in the world. Stretching across southern Mongolia and into northern China, the Gobi is a vast landscape of rocky plains, dry grasslands, and dramatic mountain ranges. Its climate is extreme, with scorching summers, freezing winters, and very little rainfall throughout the year. Despite these harsh conditions, the Gobi supports a surprising amount of life.

On this 8-day extension, we will have the chance to explore this great desert – from the stunning Flaming Cliffs, vast Khongoryn Els sand dunes and wide open skies to the great bird and small mammal diversity that inhabits this dry ecosystem. During our time here, we will be immersed in the culture of the nomadic lifestyle of the Gobi as we traverse across this historical and ecologically impressive biome.

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available. This itinerary document is intended to give some further background about what to expect and look out for, and your guide will fill you in on specific timings each day.*

**Please note.** Please also note that this extension is currently only available for our 'Mongolia's Snow Leopards' tour, which takes place in the summer months.

### Day 1

### Fly Dalanzadgad, transfer to Yolyn Am

Today, your extension will begin with a 1-hour-long internal flight to Dalanzadgad – the capital of Umnugovi Province. Upon landing, you will be greeted by your wildlife guide for your extension. After a quick breakfast, you will make the 1-hour drive to Yolyn Am, in the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains. In English, this rocky outcrop formation is known as 'Vulture's Gorge'. This afternoon, we will enjoy a gentle stroll through the gorge, scanning for any avians or small mammals that inhabit this sheltered habitat.

For our stay in Yolyn Am, we will stay at a local Ger camp (please see accommodation details on Ger camps).

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

### Day 2

### Exploring Yolyn Am

Today we will have the whole day to explore the gorge and the nearby Dungenee Valley. Short hikes in between crags and ridges will reveal a plethora of local birdlife, including Mongolian Finch, Godlewski's Bunting, Grey-necked Bunting, Mongolian Accentor, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush and even Wallcreeper – just to name a few!

Scanning the distant skies and ridges, we will be on the lookout for Bearded Vulture, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Golden Eagle and Saker Falcon. Some of our target mammals will include Siberian Ibex, Tolai Hare, Pallas's Pika, Midday Gerbil and the Marbled Polecat.

After darkness has arrived, we will enjoy a spotlighting session, hoping to spot any of these small nocturnal mammals that inhabit the Gobi.

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)



### Day 3



### Transfer to Khongoryn Els (Singing Dunes)

After a wonderful stay in Yolyn Am, we will have a long drive (almost six hours) across the desert steppe to reach Khongoryn Els (the 'Singing Dunes'). With plenty of water and snacks, and a comfortable 4x4 vehicle, we will have time to relax and soak in the unique landscape we find ourselves in.

We will arrive at the dunes in the late afternoon, and we will again be staying in a traditional Ger camp. We will then take an early evening stroll across the dunes, and if the conditions are right, we will listen out for the faint 'singing' of the dunes as the winds blow across the sand.

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

### Day 4

After a long day of travel previously, we will be up and ready to explore the Khongoryn Els dunes. We will visit the surrounding Saxaul shrub habitats, where various arid-adapted birds can be found – including the aptly named Saxaul Sparrow, Desert Wheatear and Mongolian Ground-jay.

At some point during the day, we will make a visit to a local herding community, where we will have the chance to learn about their nomadic and hardy way of life in this demanding environment.

### Full day exploring Khongoryn Els



We will again overnight at the local Ger camp.

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

## Day 5

## Transfer to Bayanzag (Flaming Cliffs)

Today we will make the roughly 4-hour drive north-east to the Bayanzag Cliffs, otherwise known as the 'Flaming Cliffs'. Named after the vibrant orange glow that the rock faces emit during a strong sunset, these cliffs are famed for their dramatic vistas, wonderful photography opportunities and prominent location for dinosaur fossil beds. We will take an evening walk along the best viewpoints, hoping to see the striking sandstone formations in the reflection of the setting sun. We will then travel back to our closely located Ger camp for the night.



(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

## Day 6

## Full day exploring Bayanzag & Saxaul Forest

We will spend the day exploring the surrounding areas of the Bayanzag Cliffs, including the Saxaul 'Forest'. The Saxaul (*Haloxylon ammodendron*) is a typical arid-adapted, sand-dwelling shrub that is found throughout many dry regions of central Asia. Its 'forests' offer shelter for many bird and small mammal species, and we will spend a good amount of time exploring this unique habitat. We will be hoping to see specialities such as Pallas's Sandgrouse, Great Grey Shrike, Crested Lark and small mammals like Great Gerbil and the bizarre Jerboas – of which four species can be seen. Other mammals that find a living here include the Corsac Fox, Black-tailed Gazelle and the Long-eared Hedgehog.



We will once again be overnighting in the Bayanzag Ger camp.

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

## Day 7

## Return transfer to Dalanzadgad

On this penultimate day of your extension, we will make the return drive to Dalanzadgad. After around three hours, we will arrive at our local lodge. After checking in, we will have the afternoon at leisure to birdwatch, visit the local town or simply relax.

(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

## Day 8

## Return flight to Ulaanbaatar

After a relaxing final evening in the Gobi Desert, we will board a morning flight back to Ulaanbaatar. After landing, we will either transfer to a local hotel, wait to join the group for our main tour, or get ready to board our onward international flights.

## Cost

The cost will depend on the number of people in the group who book the extension; please enquire for a price.

## Included in the Cost

- Private, English-speaking wildlife guide
- Private transfers throughout
- National Park permit and entry fees
- Internal flights to Dalanzadgad
- Accommodation
- All meals
- Unlimited water from large coolers but bring your own refillable water bottles. We suggest that each person brings a 1.5-litre bottle.

## Additional Expenditure

Please note that drinks, tips, and souvenirs are not included in the cost of your extension. The Mongolian Tughrig is the preferred form of payment, with the hotels accepting credit/debit cards for payment, provided they are permitted to be used overseas.

## Accommodation

During this extension you will be staying in a variety of local hotels and traditional nomadic Ger camps. The hotels will have access to Wi-Fi, air conditioning, and en-suite bathrooms.

The Ger camps are comfortable, yet rustic in their design. Many Gers have simple furnishings and en-suite-style or nearby shared washrooms. Hot showers are available at camp shower blocks (often solar- or boiler-heated) and wood or gas-fired stoves provide warmth on cooler evenings. Central dining houses will serve a mix of Mongolian and Western meals. Electricity (solar or generator) for lighting and phone charging will

be available in the evenings, whilst there will be limited or intermittent Wi-Fi/mobile signal depending on location. Basic laundry is also available throughout.

## Weather

### June

Daytime: 22–30°C

Night: 12–18°C (cooler in mountain valleys)

Rainfall/conditions: Early summer with occasional showers and thunderstorms; generally sunny. Dusty on open steppe; Yolyn Am remains cooler and fresher.

### July

Daytime: 24–32°C

Night: 14–20°C (cooler in mountain valleys)

Rainfall/conditions: Warmest month with sporadic thunderstorms; mostly dry and sunny between storms. Open desert-steppe is dusty and windy at times, gorges and river valleys noticeably cooler.

### August

Daytime: 20–28°C

Night: 10–15°C (cooler in mountain valleys)

Rainfall/conditions: Greenest month with scattered showers but generally sunny and clear. Dusty in open areas; Yolyn Am is cooler and fresher.

### September

Daytime: 15–24°C

Night: 5–12°C (can be much cooler in higher valleys)

Rainfall/conditions: Cooler, drier overall with crisp clear days.

## Extension Grading

A – Easy to moderate. Gentle walking on trails, optional dune climbing, and short hikes in canyons. No strenuous trekking required.

## What to Pack

Comfortable and practical clothing is of most use on this tour. The following list of clothing and equipment is intended to be fairly comprehensive; however, it is up to you to add or subtract to cater for your own personal requirements.

## Clothing

- Walking boots – these must be waterproof
- Walking shoes/trainers – for all purpose wear
- Casual shoes for wearing around the Ger camps
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Underwear & socks – including at least 2 pairs of walking socks
- Thermal base layer

- Long trousers (light weight)
- Short trousers
- Shirts/t-shirts
- Light jumper/fleece
- Thicker jumper/fleece
- Warm jacket
- Warm hat, gloves
- Light cotton scarf (handy to keep the sun and wind off)

## Equipment

- Binoculars – **essential**
- Telescope – **very strongly recommended**
- Daypack – for extra layers of clothing, camera, snacks etc.
- Refillable water bottle (0.5 – 1.5 litres)
- Thermos flask
- Camera & accessories
- Sunglasses
- Strong sun cream (30+) & lip salve
- Walking/trekking poles
- Folding sit mat
- Tissues
- Small torch and head torch
- Washing kit and compact mirror
- Personal first aid kit
- Insect repellent
- Maps
- Field guides/notebook/diary and pen



### Photo Credits

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