

# Mongolia

15 days Bayanhongor to Karakorum

Grasslands mountain biking - Gobi Desert - Ger Camps - Karakorum

The wilds of Mongolia have always sent out a call to those with an adventurous spirit. One of the true travelling frontiers, Mongolia offers an incredible experience for the cyclist. This cycling tour will take us on a crossing of the Arkhangai Mountains, from the edge of the Gobi desert at Bayanhongor to the old Mongolian capital of Kharkhorin. We cycle into the heart of Mongolia and meet its nomadic peoples. This is an off-roader's dream, with only 17 of 485 kilometres cycling on sealed roads. You can expect to cycle everything: rock strewn dirt roads, rocky riverbeds, compacted earth, grass, long rocky downhill, steep climbs and horse trails. This is a fully-supported ride camping under the stars when not in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital. All cooking is catered for by our local team and served in the great outdoors. We will cycle through a diversity of landscapes, including the mountains of the Arkhangai, lush green grasslands, pine forests and the spectacular Orkhon Falls. We will see a diverse array of wildlife: many birds of prey, cattle, yaks, gophers, and the pride of many Mongolians, the horse. The sheer adventure makes this trip one of our favourites!

## Itinerary

### Day 1 | Ulaan Baatar

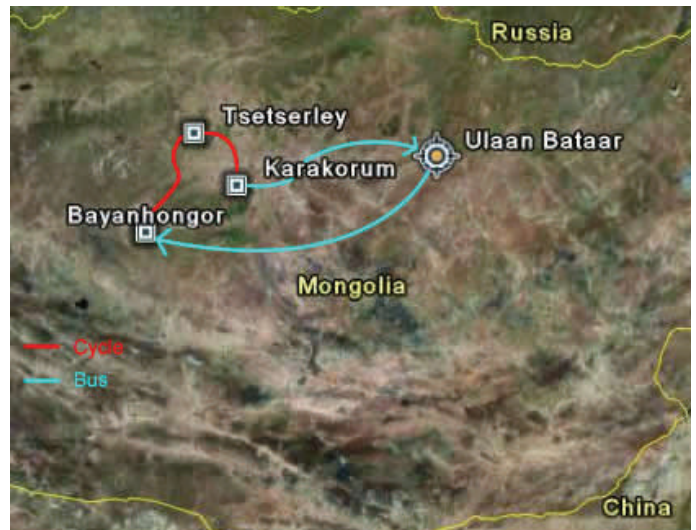
Welcome to Ulaan Baatar! Today is arrival day and there are no activities planned. If you arrive early check into the hotel and go exploring. The city is fairly small and contained so it is perfect to get around on foot. The streets are spacious and architecturally interesting. Different parts of the city reflect the country's different historical and cultural influences: the Russian-influenced Communist era architecture and planning of the centrally located Sukhbaatar Square, the suburbs filled with the traditional *ger* homes, the Buddhist-inspired temples (*sum*) and monasteries (*khiid*). There are several museums and galleries to check out if you want to see dinosaur skeletons, modern art or rare religious items. Your leader will leave information at the hotel letting you know when and where to meet for the group meeting this evening. After all the formalities have been completed, we'll head out for our first taste of Mongolian food – maybe a horse meat steak for the adventurous eaters! (D)

### Day 2 | Ulaan Baatar

For our first morning in the country, we are going to visit the Winter Palace of the colourful and controversial *Bogd Khan*, the last traditional Mongolian ruler. You will have the rest of the day free to explore of the city. (B)

### Days 3-4 | Ulaan Baatar to Bayanhongor

This is the start of our adventure as we load up the 4WDs for a two day, 800 km drive to Bayanhongor. This is a great introduction to the Mongolian countryside. Starting in the capital city's *aimag* (province) of Tov, we travel through several more aimags before arriving at our starting point for the cycling: Bayanhongor. We'll get to know our local crew who will be driving the support vehicles and cooking the food. At our destination we set up camp beside a small river at the foot of a grassy hillside. (B,L,D)



### Day 5 | Shargaljuut | 66km

We will spend an hour or more, unpacking and assembling the bikes at our campsite. Then we begin our 485km journey north-east through the Arkhangai mountain ranges to the ancient capital, Kharkhorin, established by legendary Chinggis Khan. The riding starts beside the Shargaljuut River which we follow for the rest of the morning. We then leave the river valley behind as we cycle up a valley floor to our first steep climb for the trip. At the top we'll be rewarded with 360° of magnificent views. What goes up must come down; and we do! It's very steep, very fast and very rocky; mountain biking at its best in Mongolia. We'll keep up the momentum along some fast tracks until we reach our camp spot for the evening. (B,L,D)

### Days 6-7 | Tuy River Valley | 99km

For the next two days we cycle up the Tuy River Valley, tackling its rocky riverbed and camping beside its waters at night. Because of the constant water source of this river, the area is populated with many family ger camps. The kids in

particular are usually very curious about us and our bikes, so you'll find they often ride over on their horses to check us out. Many want to try riding the bikes so there are plenty of opportunities to stop and mingle with the people of the area. On day 7 we'll set up camp at one of our favourite spots on this trip. It's by the water, so you can put a few beers in the river to cool down and pull out your fishing rod for a spot of fishing. (B,L,D)

### Days 8-9 | Tamir River Valley | 97km

On both days we travel up the Tamir Valley, with the river on our right and we'll veer north-west over two sets of mountains before a fast downhill on dirt tracks into the town of Bulgan where we might stop to pick up more supplies. The road is hilly until 30 kilometres out of Tsetserleg, where we hit some fast dirt tracks with lots of mounds that make for some fine jumps. On Day 9 we'll camp on the outskirts of Tsetserleg so that we can visit the Aimag (provincial) Museum in the temple Zayayn Gegeenii Sum. If time permits we'll cycle out of Tsetserleg towards the town of Tsenger – on the only paved roads for the whole trip! Then we will set up camp in a great little spot at the junction the Tamir and Tsenger Rivers. (B,L,D)

### Days 10-11 | Tsenger River Valley | 123km

As we travel south we will have a slow ascent till we reach the

*Olgyn Davaa* (Pass) and then a quick descent towards the Orkhon Falls where we will arrive early on day 11. The rest of the day is free for you to relax at the campsite or hike down the ravine into the gorge for a swim. (B,L,D)

### Days 12 - 13 | Orkhon River Valley | 100km

This is our last leg of cycling for the trip! We follow the Orkhon River all the way to Kharkhorin, the ancient capital at the time of the Mongolian Empire. We should arrive early on day 13 so that you have time to visit the Erdene Zuu Khiid, the first Buddhist monastery in Mongolia dating from 1586. On this night we break out the party clothes and enjoy some of the famous local *airag* – fermented mare's milk, for we're celebrating our journey across the Arkhangai Mountain Ranges! (B,L,D)

### Day 14 | Ulaan Baatar

We pack up the bikes and drive back to Ulaanbaatar, which is a full day's drive from Kharkhorin. In the evening we will go out for our final night dinner. (B,L)

### Day 15 | Departure Day

You are free to leave any time today. (B)

## Tour Details

### Style

Fully supported bicycle tour.

### Inclusions

Tents and foam sleeping mats for camping, vehicle transport from Ulaanbaatar to Bayanhongor and from Kharkhorin to Ulaanbaatar, good quality mountain bike, bike tools and spare parts, local guide, cooks and drivers, tour leader, entry tickets to Bogd Khan Winter Palace, transport to/from Winter Palace - Ulaanbaatar

### Group Size

Minimum 3, maximum 12.

### Food

Included meals: 14 breakfasts, 12 lunches, 12 dinners, plus water and snack food on cycling days. You should consider bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

### Accommodation

For this trip, 11 of the 14 nights are spent camping. We provide tents for all passengers and the sleeping arrangements are for twin-share so if you are a single traveller

you will be paired up with someone of the same sex. This ensures that whether you are travelling solo or with friends, everyone is paying the same rate. We also provide one foam mat for each participant. Should you want to bring your own super-deluxe self-inflating, ultra-light, ergonomically designed mattress... you're most welcome! For those non-camping nights, we will be staying in a hotel. We choose hotels (where possible) that are comfortable, centrally located places which are adequate in every way, with twin-share facilities and private bathrooms.

### Arriving in Ulaanbaatar

You will need to arrive at the starting point hotel in time for the group meeting, which will be held on the evening of day 1. The hotel is located in the centre of the city, with twin-share rooms, private bathrooms, hot water and television and 24 hour reception. You should print out this dossier so that you have a copy of the address to show your taxi driver. The hotel address is:

### Guide House Hotel

Address: Amar Street, Ulaanbaatar, MN, 212121  
Telephone: 976-11-353582  
Fax: 976-11-354408

If you would like us to organise extra nights at the hotel before or after the trip at our start or finish point hotel, just let us know when you book the trip.

## Cycling Details

### Cycling Days and Distance

9 days - 480km

### Difficulty

Moderate/Difficult - You will need to a good level of fitness to participate in this trip. There are nine cycling days in total with most days cycling between 50-80km on off-road terrain. Whilst this trip does not involve a lot of long mountain climbing, on most days we are cycling on undulating terrain with climbs over valley passes, some of which are very steep. The cycling is done at an altitude between 1000 – 2000 metres above sea level.

### Cycling Conditions

The terrain is almost completely off-road with the greater part being hard-packed dirt tracks strewn with rocks. There is almost no traffic but you still need to be constantly alert for rocks, potholes and track divots.

### Bikes

Bikes are included in the trip cost. Our mountain bikes are entry level standard Specialized Hard Rock, GT and Black Cat. We keep them well maintained and we travel with all necessary tools and spare parts. Your Bike Asia leader (or Bike Asia mechanic) will fix any bike problems. Supplied bikes are hard tail (front suspension) with Shimano Alivio 21 speed gears, Shimano Alivio v-brakes, off road tyres, one bottle cage, ergonomic seat, sizes 15", 17", 19" or 21". Please specify your bike size when booking. You may wish to bring your own pedals, cleats, saddle or handlebar extensions, as we can easily fit them to our bikes.

You are of course welcome to bring your own bike. Keep in mind though, that while we offer maintenance and spares for the bikes we provide, we can't guarantee that we can cater to your particular bicycle's needs so it would be best to bring your own parts and tools. If you are unsure we recommend that you speak to your local bike shop about what parts to bring.

Because we travel with a support vehicle it is not necessary to carry many things when on the bike. You may like to carry a daypack, bumbag or handlebar bag with personal belongings, camera, sunscreen etc., or you may prefer to leave a daypack in the support vehicle and carry only a camera & rain jacket (perhaps in a seatpost bag) when cycling.

### Helmets

For safe cycling we highly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

### Transporting your bike

Most international airlines consider bicycles as part of your regular luggage weight allowance, so you will need to pack light. The best way to transport a bicycle is to package it in a bike box. Most bicycle stores are happy to give away boxes for free. You will need to remove the front wheel (and sometimes the rear wheel), handle bars, pedals and seat post. Tape any loose parts to the bike frame and pack a few extras in the box such as your helmet. You can keep your box until the end of the trip to pack it for the trip home.

### Support Vehicle

For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling. You can use the support vehicle whenever you feel like no longer cycling.

## Travel Details

### Visas

Most travellers will need to obtain a Mongolian visa, either through a travel agent or direct with the Mongolian Embassy. For the latest information, see your travel agent. If you are travelling through another country to get to Mongolia (e.g. China, Korea, Japan or Russia) you should make enquiries as to whether a visa for that country will also be needed.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

If you are looking for an insurer we can recommend World Nomads. [Click to see more details.](#)

### Flights

International flights to the starting point and from the finish point are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist

with the purchase of inter-Asia flights and provide advice if you are considering overland travel.

### Money

The official currency of Mongolian is the Mongolian Tugrik (MNT). There are ATMs where you can use your Visa/Mastercard, but not (as of 2006) Maestro/Cirrus cards. Designated banks where you will be able to exchange most forms of foreign currency and Traveller's Cheques. Licensed money exchanges will provide local currency in exchange for all major forms of foreign currency but please note that it will be difficult to exchange old, well-worn notes. At these exchanges it will also be possible to change travellers' cheques but only in US dollars and other major companies.

For current exchange rates visit:

[www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com)

### Packing

While we do have a support vehicle to carry your luggage during the cycling days, you will be required to carry your own luggage at times. Luggage will need to be loaded on and off buses and up and down stairs at hotels. For this reason we recommend that you pack as lightly as possible in a backpack.

You should consider bringing the following items:



### Personal

Backpack  
Long trousers  
Shorts  
Shirts  
Warm jacket  
Thermals  
Woolen socks  
Jumper  
Hat  
Sandals/Light Shoes  
Swimming Costume  
Rain/Wind coat  
Sunglasses  
Light Rain Coat  
Toiletries  
Tampons (hard to get in China)  
Small Towel  
Sunscreen  
Goves/Scarf  
Beanie  
First Aid Kit  
Mosquito Repellent  
Camera and Film/Memory  
Alarm Clock  
Gloves/Scarf

### Travel

Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages  
China/Nepal Visas  
Passport photo  
Travel insurance details  
Flight tickets  
Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques  
Phrase book

### Bicycle

Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. day pack, bum Bag, handlebar bag  
Helmet  
Cycling gloves  
Bicycle water bottle  
Bike shorts with something to put on over the top while off the bike

### Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$10 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Mongolia. You should allow approximately US\$30 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction.

### Electricity

China works on a 220 volt system and uses round 2 pin plugs. You can easily buy an adapter in country for much cheaper than home in your country.

Plugs look like this:    o    o

## Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

### Dress

Mongolia is still quite a conservative country. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you, on the bike, to put on over the top (long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong). When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Singlet tops are not acceptable in temples.

### Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak some English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Mongolian. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

### Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free give away's. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures which we will then pass on to development organisations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities

### Poverty

In Mongolia there is poverty which you may see, mainly in the capital Ulaanbaatar. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. There are organizations which are working to alleviate this poverty and may be able to do more good with donations that you make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

These notes last updated: 12 May 2008

### Important

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

