

Western Mongolia - Altai Mountain Biking Tour (Tour number NW223)



4 - 21 September 2022

The Altai mountain range in the far west of the country is home to Mongolia's largest national minority, the Kazakhs who came to settle here almost 200 years ago. It is within this area that we will cycle and explore this little visited area, in the company of goats, yaks and horses that graze the plains shadowed by Mountains. The culmination is a fascinating tradition, celebrated during "The Golden Eagle Festival". With a backdrop of majestic snow-capped mountains, Golden eagles demonstrate their speed and agility under the command of their proud masters. You will also experience true wilderness and authentic nomadic culture within the Tavan Bogd national park where Mongolia's highest peaks mark the border with both China and Russia.

Itinerary

Sun 4 Sep - Arrival at Ulaanbaatar

Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar (UB) you will be met by your guide and transferred to a hotel in the city centre. Time permitting, you will be taken on a guided tour to some of the city's highlights, including a giant Buddha statue at Mongolia's main Buddhist center, the National museum and the central square. A traditional throat singing and contortion performance will be presented at the end of the day. At a welcome dinner you will be given an informal introduction to the tour ahead of you.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Mon 5 Sep - Extra day at the start in Ulaanbaatar

Extra day at the start in Ulaanbaatar

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Tue 6 Sep - Flight to Ulgii, Bike to Tsagaan Nuur lake

Transfer to airport and fly to the westernmost province of Bayan-Olgii where the country's highest mountains lie. On arrival meet with the support team and start biking straight from the airport heading towards the mountains and acclimatizing to the dry air and altitude. The 55km tarmac stretch is the only sealed part of the whole journey of 550km across the Altai mountain range. Tonight we erect our tent camp not far from the Mongolian-Russian border.

- Route distance: 55 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Wed 7 Sep - Bike to Khaichintsar mountain

Two thirds of the way is a gradual ascent along the Russian borderline on desolate mountain roads and faint tracks until reaching the day's highest point at 2575m. Vast numbers of domesticated animals mainly yaks and goats grazing on steep slopes and rugged ridges can often be seen. They belong to local Muslim Kazakhs whose felt walled tents known as gers or yurts can also be seen in twos or threes. An occasional encounter with a curious shepherd or local children always offers a chance for taking some good photos. The last 20km is a downhill to a grassy campsite by a small stream. We sleep at almost 2200m.

- Route distance: 69 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Thur 8 Sep - Bike to Black Goat River

We cycle further west across mountainous desert with terrain that requires more climbing than the previous days. Although the riding surface is dominated by packed soils rocky tracks, loose soil is also present especially near the mountain passes. Today we camp in less than 10km from the Russian border at a scenic riverside.

- Route distance: 46 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Fri 9 Sep - Bike to Tavan Bogd National Park

We continue a short while along the rugged folds of Baga Oigor valley and stop at a border patrol station to settle formalities. En-route, we stop at Oigor petroglyph gallery designated as the UNESCO "World Cultural Heritage Site. Stone and Bronze Age rock carvings here are scattered across an area 15km long and 500m wide. Images depict wild and domestic animals and scenes of human life such as hunting, herding, worship etc. The road then climbs up a grassy shoulder between two dome shaped mountains. This brings us to an enormous V-shaped mountain valley with clear streams running down from glaciers that cover the ridge top. The main feature of the mountains here is the alternation of grassy slopes with massive walls of loose scree. Here we cycle by some alpine lakes, a summer base for local Kazakh herdsmen. They live in large mushroom-like yurts and tend their massive flocks of yaks and goats. It will be interesting to visit them and learn about the way of life which seemingly hasn't changed for many hundreds of years. At the day's end we arrive to Tavan Bogd NP gate, a few yurts - home of local rangers at the foothill of even bigger mountains.

- Route distance: 59 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sat 10 Sep - Bike to White River

We pedal and push the bikes on the high mountain terrain strewn with running streams and patches of snow. The day's halfway point is an elevated hill from which there opens a panoramic view of Mongolia's highest peaks and largest glaciers. We eat our lunch while enjoying the magnificent views before heading down towards a deep V-shaped valley at the bottom of which rumbles a torrential river full of glacial silt. This is the White river valley – lush summer pastureland of herding nomads. We free-wheel down a steep slope to arrive to

our campsite by the glacial river. The day's highlight will be a visit to a herding family of Turkic ethnic origin that have historically been inhabiting southern Siberia. Traditionally they practice shamanism - a worship of ancestral and natural spirits but today their belief is a strong blend with Tibetan Buddhism. We use the chance to learn of their way of life and to taste food and drinks offered by the unwritten local rules.

- Route distance: 26 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sun 11 Sep - Bike to Toroo Valley

This morning we climb to the southern brim of the valley towards Holy Mt. Shiveet and cycle along its base. Time permitting, we stop at a massive flat rock strewn with hundreds of images of wild beasts, cattle and hunting people at the mountain east end. From there we roll downhill into the widening valley for another 20km and climb to a high plateau using seasonal migration roads. We spend the night at 2600m in a wide lush valley surrounded by majestic mountains.

- Route distance: 50 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Mon 12 Sep - Bike to Khoton Lake

Continue further south enjoying spectacular scenery: grassy uplands, alpine lakes and rugged hills. We will be travelling at an average altitude of 2500m and depending on the time in the summer, we might come across locals moving with antique Russian trucks, fearlessly negotiating tricky mountain roads. We may also meet Kazakh hunters who train golden eagles and use them for hunting. Although actual hunting is done in winter you can still see the massive birds and have a photo taken holding one on your arms. At the day end arrive at Khoton; a spectacular alpine lake bordering with China's Xinjiang province.

- Route distance: 61 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Tue 13 Sep - Rest at Khoton lake

We spend a well-earned rest day at ease. The Khoton lake campsite is truly idyllic. A snow-capped ridge marking the borderline with China and wooded slopes below reflect in the mirror-like surface of the lake. You can go swimming or explore some distinctly well preserved Bronze-age rock carvings just beside the camp.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Wed 14 Sep - Bike to Black lake

We cross a narrow straight linking the Khoton with its “sister” lake called Khurgan and ride along the latter enjoying views of the snow-capped ridge that marks the borderline with China and pretty woods at its foot. After lunch we enjoy a fast blast across an open plain before ascending to a lake shore at 2500m.

- Route distance: 71 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Thur 15 Sep - Bike to Sagsai Valley

We ride the length of the lakes shore and continue along rugged mountain bases and grassy slopes that are a perfect grazing for yaks and sheep of which you will see hundreds along the way. 12km climb to the day’s highest point is followed by 15km downhill ride to our last campsite amidst the semi-desert landscape.

- Route distance: 70 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Tent
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Fri 16 Sep - Bike to Olgii

The last 35km to Olgii town are rather uneventful. The tour’s last challenge will be climbing 400m in 8km. A descent on a dusty road will bring us to the edge of the capital of the westernmost province and to a cozy hotel to celebrate the end to the cycling adventure.

- Route distance: 43 km
- Route altitude gain: 0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sat 17 Sep - Eagle festival

For 2 days we attend the annual Golden Eagle festival. 50 eagles guided by their masters, will compete displaying their speed and agility: each bird is released from a mountain top commanded by his master to land on to an artificial prey as fast as possible. Participate in the excitement of traditional Kazakh games, such as ‘kyzkuar,’ a dating game played on horseback and ‘kokpar,’ a tug-of-war game played on horseback with a goatskin. There will also be a parade where each hunter demonstrates his outfit and riding harness. As we will be based in Olgii, time permitting you can explore the town with its distinct Central Asian

character, visit the town market and museum. A traditional Kazakh meal accompanied by music and songs will be served on one of these days.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sun 18 Sep - Eagle festival

A second day at the festival

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Mon 19 Sep - Flight to Ulaanbaatar.

Transfer to Olgii airport and fly back to UB. Upon arrival transfer to your hotel. Rest until we gather for a farewell dinner.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tue 20 Sep - Ullaanbaatar

A contingency day.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Wed 21 Sep - Depature

Transfer to the airport for your return flight back home

- No cycling



Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £2360.0

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £300 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £2060 per person to be paid by 26th June 2022

Price includes:

- 4 nights in 4 star Bayangol hotel
- 3 nights in Olgiy hotel
- 10 tented nights, twin share
- Camping mats
- All indicated meals + bottled drinking water
- Extra snacks and drinks on cycling days
- Back up van
- Flight ticket Ulaanbaatar-Olgiy-Ulaanbaatar
- All airport transfers
- English speaking cycling guide
- Bike mechanic
- Cook with an assistant
- National park and border permit fees
- Eagle festival fees
- Gratuities
- Mountain bikes (hard-tail 27.5 Giant XTC800-860, 30 speed, hydraulic brakes, Shimano components)

Price does not include:

- Travel to and from Ulaanbaatar
- Sleeping bag
- Excess baggage fee on the local flights
- Meals not indicated
- Drinks & alcohol
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance

Cancellations

Written Notice Received: Cancellation Charge:

- 25th June 2022: £300 (deposit)
- 26th June to Departure: £2360 (full amount)

Holiday Information

Hotels

- The Bayangol hotel is close to the centre of Ulaanbaatar and is a comfortable base to explore the city.

Tents

- Tents are supplied. These will be of a North Face design type. These will be transferred by the back up van and you will be expected to put your own tent up on most days, though others (including myself) will be willing to help. The tents are for two people, but if you are tall (over 1.89 metres) or you prefer a tent to yourself a supplement can be paid (£50) You can also bring your own if you wish

Sleeping mats and sleeping bags

- Sleeping mats are provided, but for hygiene reasons, you are asked to bring your own sleeping bag.

Meals on camping days

- A large dedicated cooking tent is provided. Meals will be taken sitting down at a table in the same tent

Toilets

- In the camp, a toilet tent is provided at a suitable distance from the camp, please remember to bring a torch

The nature of the holiday

- Mongolia is comparatively undeveloped in terms of tourism and, despite the recent appearance of mobile phones and solar panels, has a basic infrastructure once outside of Ulaanbaatar. Time will be spend in remote areas without home comforts or easy access to medical facilities. Although a very high level of physical fitness is not required, participants should be comfortable with the realities of a wilderness adventure and be prepared for basic conditions in the countryside. Outside of the city you will be the guests of people who are untouched by western values and standards.

Vehicle Support

- Full vehicle support with a roof rack for bikes. The UAZ-452 is a part of this tour, often owned by the guides these little grey vehicles have the ability to go almost anywhere

Rides and Rest Days

- This is a unique, adventurous and sometimes demanding tour, best suited to experienced, enthusiast adventure cyclists with a pioneering spirit. Riding surfaces will include improved single-vehicle dirt/gravel roads, some sandy patches, rocky descents and vehicle tracks through the grass steppe. There will be knee-deep unbridged rivers and streams to cross. Daily mileages of 40-80kmpd are reasonable to allow for the difficult terrain. Good bike handling skills over a variety of terrains will be required. Vehicle assistance will be available if needed. Please note that it may be necessary to change the itinerary should conditions dictate.

Group information

- The maximum number of participants will be 13 excluding the Tour Leader

Weather and Clothing

- Mongolia experiences extremes of weather year round. In the Altai mountains expect temperatures up to 22 (average 16) . When camping at altitude in the Altai Mountains, night temperatures could be below freezing. (Average 1 degrees) Rain cannot be ruled out. It is essential that you bring clothing suitable for all conditions.

Cycles / Equipment

- Hire bikes are supplied, these may not have racks so you are advised to bring a frame bag, handlebar bag, seatpost bag or any combination for carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing, a camera, snacks and the map provided. The wearing of a cycling helmet is your personal choice.

Maps

- A map showing the outline route will be provided, however tracks are unmapped. Guidance will be given by our Mongolian guide and the support vehicle crew, who are very experienced in doing this. The route is an established cycling route but has not previously been ridden by the Tour Manager.

Travel Insurance and advice

- Before booking you should check the latest travel advice from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or on 0845 850 2829.