

Mongolia

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1	General information about Mongolia	6
1.1	Yahoo: Essential informations of Mongolia	6
1.1.1	Essentials	6
1.1.2	Environment	6
1.1.3	When to Go	6
1.1.4	Facts for the Traveller	6
1.1.5	Money & Costs	6
1.1.6	Facts at a Glance	7
1.1.7	Economic Profile	7
1.2	CIA -- The World Factbook 1999 -- Mongolia	7
1.2.1	Geography	7
1.2.2	People	8
1.2.3	Government	8
1.2.4	Economy	9
1.2.5	Communications	10
1.2.6	Transportation	10
1.2.7	Military	11
1.3	Lonely Planet - Destination Mongolia	11
1.3.1	Facts at a Glance	11
1.3.2	Environment	11
1.3.3	History	11
1.3.4	Economic Profile	13
1.3.5	Culture	13
1.3.6	Events	13
1.3.7	Facts for the Traveller	14
1.3.8	Money & Costs	14
1.3.9	When to Go	14
1.3.10	Attractions	14
1.3.10.1	Ulaan Baatar	14
1.3.10.2	Four Holy Peaks	15
1.3.10.3	Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve	15
1.3.10.4	Kharkhorin (Karakorum)	15
1.3.10.5	Khövsgöl Nuur	16
1.3.11	Off the Beaten Track	16
1.3.11.1	Amarbayasgalant Khiid	16
1.3.11.2	Gurvansaikhan National Park	16
1.3.11.3	Khovd	16
1.3.12	Activities	16
1.3.13	Getting There & Away	17
1.3.14	Getting Around	17
1.4	Lonely Planet - Travellers' reports on Mongolia	17
1.4.1	Visas, Embassies & Border Crossings	17
1.4.2	Travel Tips	18
1.4.3	Moving About	18
1.4.4	Gems, Highlights & Attractions	18
1.4.5	Yarns, Fables & Anecdotes	18
2	FAQ	19
2.1	Normandic Expedition	19
2.1.1	Why would I want to visit Mongolia?	19
2.1.2	Is Mongolia safe?	19
2.1.3	When is the best time of the year to go to Mongolia and what is the weather like?	19
2.1.4	What are the ports of entry into Mongolia?	20
2.1.5	What forms of transportation are used for traveling within Mongolia?	20
2.1.6	What type of accommodations are available in Mongolia?	20
2.1.7	What types of food will I be eating in Mongolia?	20
2.1.8	What sorts of activities are available and how do I know which trip will provide me with the activity level I desire?	20
2.1.9	What is the medical care like in Mongolia?	21
2.1.10	What is the average price of a trip to Mongolia?	21
2.1.11	Can children participate in a trip to Mongolia?	21
2.1.12	What type of government is in power?	21
2.1.13	What is "inner" and "outer" Mongolia?	21
2.1.14	What language is spoken in Mongolia?	21
2.1.15	What currency is used in Mongolia?	21
2.1.16	What is the main religion practiced in Mongolia?	22
2.2	Mongolia FAQ	22
2.2.1	Land, People, Language	22
2.2.1.1	Where do Mongolians live?	22
2.2.2	Administrative	22
2.2.2.1	I want to travel to Mongolia. What kind of travel documentation do I need?	22
2.2.2.2	I want to travel to Inner Mongolia. What kind of travel documentation do I need?	22
2.2.3	Tourism	22
2.2.3.1	How to travel to Mongolia?	22
2.2.3.2	What kind of accommodation is available in Mongolia?	23
2.2.4	Inner Mongolia - Tourism	23

2.2.4.1	How to travel to Inner Mongolia?	23
2.2.4.2	What kind of accommodation is available in Inner Mongolia?	23
2.2.4.3	What kind of transport is available in Inner Mongolia?	24
2.2.4.4	Which season is recommended for travelling?	24
2.2.4.5	What are the points of sightseeing, museums etc.?	24
3	Transportation	24
3.1	Yahoo: Getting There & Away	24
3.1.1.1	Getting There & Away	24
3.1.1.2	Getting Around	24
3.2	Railway Information for Mongolia	25
3.3	Transport in Mongolia	25
3.3.1.1	Air	25
3.3.1.2	Train	25
3.3.1.3	Bus	25
3.3.1.4	Shared Jeeps and Minibuses	25
3.3.1.5	Renting Transport	25
4	Attractions and events	26
4.1	Excite Travel: Destinations: Mongolia: What to Do	26
4.1.1	Activities	26
4.1.1.1	ARKHANGAI (Arkangai)	26
4.1.1.2	DARKHAN (Darchan, Darhan)	26
4.1.1.3	GOBI DESERT (Shamo Desert)	26
4.1.1.4	KARAKORUM (Har Horin, Qaraqorum)	26
4.1.1.5	KHENTII (Hentii)	26
4.1.1.6	KHOVD	26
4.1.1.7	KHUJHIRT (Hujirt, Kujirt)	27
4.1.1.8	LAKE KHOVSGOL (Hovskul)	27
4.1.1.9	MANZSHIR HIID	27
4.1.1.10	MORON	27
4.1.1.11	NAUSHKI	27
4.1.1.12	SAYNSHAND	27
4.1.1.13	TERELJ	27
4.1.1.14	ULAANBAATAR (Ulan Bator, Kulun, Urga, Niisel Huree)	27
4.2	Attractions	28
4.2.1	Ulaan Baatar	28
4.2.2	Four Holy Peaks	28
4.2.3	Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve	28
4.2.4	Kharkhorin (Karakorum)	29
4.2.5	Khövsgöl Nuur	29
4.3	The Best Current Tour Sites	29
4.4	Tourist Attractions & Destinations	30
4.4.1	Kharakhorum	30
4.4.2	Gobi Desert	30
4.4.3	Lake Khovsgol	31
4.4.4	Amarbayasgalant Monastery	31
4.4.5	Terelj Resort	31
4.4.6	Khan Khentii	31
4.4.7	Khorgo	31
4.4.8	Manzshir Monastery	31
4.4.9	Bayan Ulgi	31
4.5	Yahoo: Events and activities	31
4.5.1	Events	31
4.5.2	Activities	31
4.6	Yahoo: Off the beaten track	32
4.6.1	Amarbayasgalant Khiid	32
4.6.2	Gurvansaikhan National Park	32
4.6.3	Khovd	32
4.7	Erdene Zuu Monastery	32
4.8	The Shanch Lama Monastery	33
5	Culture	33
5.1	Generally	33
5.2	Mongolian People, Lifestyle and Culture	34
5.2.1	People	34
5.2.2	Lifestyle	34
5.2.3	Food	35
5.2.4	Language	36
5.2.5	Clothing	36
5.2.6	Music & Singing	37
5.2.7	Festivals	37

5.2.8	Sports	39
5.2.9	Traditional Medicine	39
5.2.10	The Ger	40
5.2.11	Religion	40
5.2.12	Arts	41
5.2.13	The 12 Year Calendar	41
5.2.14	Cultural Tips	42
5.3	Traditions and Customs	42
5.4	Here are some tips to help you with the locals	43
5.5	The Mongolian Ger	43
6	History	44
6.1	A Brief History of MONGOLIA	45
6.2	The Genghis Khan Cult	46
7	Ulaanbaatar - Mongolia's Capital City	46
7.1	Ulaanbaatar - Mongolia's Capital City	46
7.1.1	Location and Orientation	46
7.1.2	History	46
7.1.3	Accommodation	46
7.1.4	Getting Around	46
7.1.5	Freight Forwarders	47
7.1.6	Bookshops and Libraries	47
7.1.7	Services	47
7.1.8	Internet Cafes	47
7.2	Banks and Money Changers in Ulaanbaatar	47
7.3	Shops & Shopping in Ulaanbaatar	48
7.4	Ulaanbaatar	49
7.4.1	Welcome to Mongolia	49
7.4.2	Ulaanbaatar	49
8	Legal stuff	49
8.1	General Information for Tourists to Mongolia	49
8.1.1	Customs	50
8.1.2	Embassies	51
8.1.3	Climate	51
8.1.4	Transport	51
8.1.5	Language	51
8.1.6	Food	51
8.1.7	Time Differences	51
8.1.8	When to go	52
8.1.9	Activities	52
8.1.10	What to take	52
8.1.11	Maps	52
8.1.12	Tipping/Bargaining	52
8.1.13	Dangers/Annoyances	52
8.1.14	Shops & Shopping	53
8.1.15	Currency	53
8.1.16	Banks	53
8.1.17	Public Holidays in 2000	53
8.1.18	Tourism Information	53
8.1.19	Photography	53
8.1.20	Accommodation	54
8.1.21	Medical Information	54
8.1.22	Water Quality	54
8.1.23	Electricity	54
8.1.24	Telephones	54
8.1.25	Postal Services	55
8.2	Police Registration Information for Visitors	55
8.2.1	Who should register?	55
8.2.2	How do I register?	55
8.2.3	Going to be in the countryside?	55
8.2.4	How much does registration cost?	56
8.2.5	Notes	56
8.3	Visa Information	56
8.3.1	Who needs visas?	56
8.3.2	Where can visas be obtained?	56
8.3.3	What do I need to apply for a visa?	57
8.3.4	How long can I stay in Mongolia?	57
8.3.5	Do I need to register with the Police?	57
8.3.6	What visa classifications are available in Mongolia?	57
8.3.7	What visa types are available?	57

8.3.8	Can I enter and leave Mongolia by foot, horse, car or	motorcycle?	58
8.3.9	Leaving Mongolia		58
8.4	Foreign Embassies in Mongolia		58
8.4.1	Czech Republic		58
9	České a slovenské stránky		58
9.1	Z Olomouce do Vladivostoku na kole - Mongolsko		58
9.1.1	ROZHODOVÁNÍ		58
9.1.2	MONGOLSKO JSEM SI VYHÁDAL		58
9.1.3	NEČEKANĚ STUDENÉ POČASÍ		59
9.1.4	KRÁSNA PŘÍRODA, HROZNÉ CESTY		59
9.1.5	KOMÁŘI PŘIVÁDĚJÍ K ŠILENSTVÍ		59
9.1.6	KAŽDÝ MONGOL MÁ SVOU CESTU		60
9.1.7	HOSTEM MINISTRA		60
9.1.8	KONEČNĚ ASFALT		60
9.1.9	ULÁNBÁTAR		61
9.1.10	NA VÝLETĚ V POUŠTI GOBI		61
9.1.11	POZVÁNÍ NA ZABIJAČKU		61
9.1.12	„BAJAR TAI“ MONGOLSKO		62
9.1.13	ČESKO - MONGOLSKÝ SLOVNÍK		62
9.2	Cesta na východ		62
9.2.1	Jak se tam dostat?		62
9.2.2	Pití čaje v Mongolsku		62
9.3	Ulaanbaatar		62
9.3.1	Co musíte v Ulaanbaataru a okolo vidět		63
9.3.1.1	Chrámy		63
9.3.1.2	Muzea		63
9.3.1.3	Památník <i>Zaisan</i> - vyhlídka		63
9.3.1.4	Chrám <i>Mandžšir</i> a přírodní muzeum		63
9.3.2	Nákupy		63
9.3.3	Kde a jak žít v Ulaanbaataru		63
10	Mongolské dobrodružstvo - cestopis		64
10.1	Transibírská magistrála		64
10.2	Bajkal, alebo ako stopnúť vlak		64
10.3	Klasická chuť Mongolska		65
10.4	Chovschod nuur		65
10.5	Londonovka		65
10.6	Opitý Zoloon		66
10.7	To neni možné		66
10.8	Gobi		66
10.9	Púštne mesto		67
10.10	Nomádi		67
10.11	Bajandzag		67
10.12	Dobrá chuť, rýchle nohy		67
10.13	Džingisove mesto		67
10.14	Epilóg		68
11	Traveler diaries		68
11.1	Mongolia		68
12	Itineraries of various travel agencies		70
12.1	Normandic Expeditions		70
12.2	Samar Magic Tours		76
12.2.1	Nature Adventure Travel		76
	Mongolian Tour in the Steppes of Genghis Khan		77
	Adventure Travel & Trekking		79
12.2.4	Nomadic Discovery Tour		80
	Horseback Riding to the First capital of the Great Mongolian Empire		82
12.2.6	Exotic Great Green Tour in the Steppes of Genghis Khan		83
12.3	Mongolia Outback		84

1 General information about Mongolia

1.1 *Yahoo: Essential informationes of Mongolia*

1.1.1 Essentials

The name 'Mongolia' has always stirred up visions of the untamed and exotic - the warlord Genghis Khan, camels wandering in the Gobi Desert and wild horses galloping across the steppes. Even today, Mongolia seems like the end of the earth - outside Ulaan Baatar you begin to wonder if you haven't stepped into another century, rather than another country. It remains one of the last great adventure destinations in Asia.

Mongolia's survival as an independent nation is little short of miraculous. For the first time in centuries the Mongolians, once rulers of the vast Eurasian steppe, are no longer colonial subjects of the Russian and Chinese empires. Only a century ago, so few Mongolians were left that it seemed their ancient, nomadic civilisation might disappear altogether. Now the country has a constitution, multiparty elections and a ruling democratic coalition.

Travel in Mongolia can be hard but if you're ready for a tough, invigorating journey, grab your warmest winter coat, steady your stomach and steel your nerves. It's worth the wander into nomad's land.

1.1.2 Environment

Mongolia is a huge, landlocked country about 3 times the size of France, squashed between China and Russia. It was immeasurably bigger during the period of Mongol conquest under Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. Until the 20th century Mongolia was twice its present size and included a large chunk of Siberia and Inner Mongolia (now controlled by China). Mongolia is one of the highest countries in the world, with an average elevation of 1580m (5180ft). Its highest mountains are in the far west. The Mongol Altai Nuruu are permanently snowcapped, and their highest peak, Tavanbogd Uul (4370m/14,350ft), has a magnificent glacier that towers over Mongolia, Russia and China. Between the peaks are stark deserts where rain almost never falls. Elsewhere, Mongolia has numerous saltwater and freshwater lakes, the largest of which is the Khövsgöl Nuur, which contains 2% of the world's fresh water.

The southern third of Mongolia is dominated by the Gobi Desert. Although barren looking, it has enough grass to support scattered herds of sheep, goats and camels. Much of the rest of Mongolia is grassland, home to Mongolia's famed *takhi* horses, which Genghis Khan used so successfully in his wars of conquest.

Although it boasts over 260 sunny days a year and is known as the 'Land of Blue Sky', Mongolia's climate is extreme. Long subarctic winters are the norm and you can see snow in the Gobi Desert as late as April; some lakes remain frozen until June. There's a short rainy season from mid-July to September, but showers tend to be brief and gentle. Because of the high altitude, evenings are cool even in summer. In Ulaan Baatar, the winter (October to April) is long and cold, with temperatures dropping to -30°C (-85°F) in January and February. Horrific dust storms kick up during the short spring (May to June).

1.1.3 When to Go

The travel season is typically from May to early October, though Ulaan Baatar can be visited any time of year if you can tolerate the bitter cold. Early July has the best weather for the northern part of the country and is also the time to celebrate Mongolia's Naadam Festival. Be aware, though, that this is also when Ulaan Baatar's inadequate accommodation and creaky transport is stretched to the breaking point. June and September are both pleasant times to visit, and attract fewer visitors. The best months to visit the Gobi Desert and not get toasted are September and October. Be aware that between mid-October and mid-May sudden snowstorms and extreme cold can ground flights, block roads and cause the country's transport system to stall.

1.1.4 Facts for the Traveller

Visas: Entry and exit visas are required of all nationalities. To get a visa, visitors must be invited or sponsored by a Mongolian, a Mongolian company or a resident foreigner, or be part of an organised tour. Some consulates and embassies interpret the regulations more liberally than others. A visa costs around US\$25.

Health risks: Brucellosis, cholera, meningococcal meningitis, bubonic plague

Time: UTC/GMT plus 8 hours; UTC/GMT plus 7 hours in the western provinces of Bayan-Ölgii, Uvs and Khovd

Electricity: 220V, 50Hz

Weights & measures: Metric

Tourism: Approximately 17,000 travellers a year

1.1.5 Money & Costs

Currency: tögrög (T or MNT)

Relative costs:

- Budget meal: US\$3-5
- Moderate restaurant meal: US\$5-10
- Top-end restaurant meal: US\$10-20
- Top-end hotel: US\$20 and upwards
- Budget room: US\$5-10
- Moderate hotel: US\$10-20

If you're travelling on an organised tour you'll probably spend about US\$100 a day. You can travel independently, see the same sights and stay in the same places for about US\$80 a day - a lot less if you share the cost of a private jeep and camp rather than stay in pricier *gers* (tents). Accommodation and food will cost at least US\$10 a day in Ulaan Baatar, but you're better off budgeting closer to double that. In the countryside, allow about US\$15 per day if you're using public transport and staying in hotels; if you take a tent and camp, you'll spend closer to US\$7 per day.

Bring US dollar travellers' cheques and have some US dollars in cash. Credit cards are handy at some hotels and at airline offices in Ulaan Baatar, but you won't be able to buy anything on credit outside the capital. For some unknown reason, US dollars dated before 1988 are unacceptable.

There's supposedly a mandatory 10% 'government' tax levied in Ulaan Baatar's posher restaurants and hotels, but most places either don't bother adding it onto the bill or haven't heard of the tax. Tipping is appreciated in upmarket restaurants. Bargaining is catching on in the public markets, but be prepared to pay more than Mongolians.

1.1.6 Facts at a Glance

Area: 1,566,000 sq km (610,740 sq mi)

Population: 2.5 million

People: Khalkh Mongols (86%), Kazaks (6%), Chinese (2%), Russian (2%), about a dozen other ethnic groups

Languages: Mongolian, Turkic, Russian, Chinese

Religions: Tibetan Buddhism, Muslim, Shamanism

Government: Parliamentary democracy

President: Natsagiin Bagabandi

1.1.7 Economic Profile

GDP: US\$5 billion

GDP per head: US\$1970

Annual growth: 6%

Inflation: 53%

Major industries: Copper, livestock, cashmere, wool

Major trading partners: Former Soviet and Eastern European states, China, Austria

1.2 CIA -- *The World Factbook 1999* -- Mongolia

1.2.1 Geography

Location: Northern Asia, between China and Russia

Geographic coordinates: 46 00 N, 105 00 E

Map references: Asia

Area:

total: 1.565 million sq km

land: 1.565 million sq km

water: 0 sq km

Area—comparative: slightly smaller than Alaska

Land boundaries:

total: 8,114 km

border countries: China 4,673 km, Russia 3,441 km

Coastline: 0 km (landlocked)

Maritime claims: none (landlocked)

Climate: desert; continental (large daily and seasonal temperature ranges)

Terrain: vast semidesert and desert plains; mountains in west and southwest; Gobi Desert in southeast

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Hoh Nuur 518 m

highest point: Tavan Bogd Uul 4,374 m

Natural resources: oil, coal, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, phosphates, tin, nickel, zinc, wolfram, fluorspar, gold

Land use:

arable land: 1%

permanent crops: 0%

permanent pastures: 80%

forests and woodland: 9%

other: 10% (1993 est.)

Irrigated land: 800 sq km (1993 est.)

Natural hazards: dust storms can occur in the spring; grassland fires

Environment—current issues: limited natural fresh water resources; policies of the former communist regime promoting rapid urbanization and industrial growth have raised concerns about their negative effects on the environment; the burning of

soft coal and the concentration of factories in Ulaanbaatar have severely polluted the air; deforestation, overgrazing, the converting of virgin land to agricultural production have increased soil erosion from wind and rain; desertification; mining activities have also had a deleterious effect on the environment

Environment—international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Nuclear Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Wetlands

signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements

Geography—note: landlocked; strategic location between China and Russia

1.2.2 People

Population: 2,617,379 (July 1999 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 36% (male 480,087; female 464,609)

15-64 years: 60% (male 787,222; female 787,405)

65 years and over: 4% (male 42,219; female 55,837) (1999 est.)

Population growth rate: 1.45% (1999 est.)

Birth rate: 22.51 births/1,000 population (1999 est.)

Death rate: 7.97 deaths/1,000 population (1999 est.)

Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1999 est.)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female

under 15 years: 1.03 male(s)/female

15-64 years: 1 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.76 male(s)/female

total population: 1 male(s)/female (1999 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 64.63 deaths/1,000 live births (1999 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 61.81 years

male: 59.71 years

female: 64.02 years (1999 est.)

Total fertility rate: 2.6 children born/woman (1999 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Mongolian(s)

adjective: Mongolian

Ethnic groups: Mongol 90%, Kazakh 4%, Chinese 2%, Russian 2%, other 2%

Religions: predominantly Tibetan Buddhist, Muslim 4%
note: previously limited religious activity because of communist regime

Languages: Khalkha Mongol 90%, Turkic, Russian, Chinese

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 82.9%

male: 88.6%

female: 77.2% (1988 est.)

1.2.3 Government

Country name:

conventional long form: none

conventional short form: Mongolia

local long form: none

local short form: Mongol Uls

former: Outer Mongolia

Data code: MG

Government type: republic

Capital: Ulaanbaatar

Administrative divisions: 18 provinces (aymguud, singular—aymag) and 3 municipalities* (hotuud, singular—hot); Arhangay, Bayanhongor, Bayan-Olgii, Bulgan, Darhan*, Dornod, Dornogovi, Dundgovi, Dzavhan, Erdenet*, Govi-Altay, Hentiy, Hovd, Hovsgol, Omnogovi, Ovorhangay, Selenge, Suhbaatar, Tov, Ulaanbaatar*, Uvs

Independence: 13 March 1921 (from China)

National holiday: National Day, 11 July (1921)

Constitution: 12 February 1992

Legal system: blend of Russian, Chinese, and Turkish systems of law; no constitutional provision for judicial review of legislative acts; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Natsagiyn BAGABANDI (since 20 June 1997)

head of government: Prime Minister Janlavyn NARANTSATSRALT (since 9 December 1998)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the State Great Hural in consultation with the president

elections: president nominated by parties in the State Great Hural and elected by popular vote for a four-year term; election last held 18 May 1997 (next to be held summer 2001); following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or majority coalition is usually elected prime minister by the State Great Hural

election results: Natsagiyn BAGABANDI elected president; percent of vote—Natsagiyn BAGABANDI (MPRP) 60.8%, Punsalmaagiyn OCHIRBAT (MNDP and MSDP) 29.8%, Jambyn GOMBOJAV (MUTP) 6.6%; following five months of

political deadlock which left Mongolia without a working government, Janlavyn NARANTSATSRALT was elected prime minister on 9 December 1998 by a vote in the State Great Hural of 36 to 21, with nine abstentions and 10 absentees

Legislative branch: unicameral State Great Hural (76 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)
elections: last held 30 June 1996 (next to be held NA June 2000)

election results: percent of vote by party—DUC 66%, MPRP 33%, MCP 1%; seats by party—DUC 50 (MNDP 34, MSDP 13, independents 3), MPRP 25, MCP 1

Judicial branch: Supreme Court, serves as appeals court for people's and provincial courts, but to date rarely overturns verdicts of lower courts, judges are nominated by the General Council of Courts for approval by the State Great Hural

Political parties and leaders: Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party or MPRP [N. ENKHBAYAR, general secretary]; Democratic Union Coalition or DUC [Mendsaihan ENHSAIHAN, general secretary] (includes Mongolian National Democratic Party or MNDP [T. ELBEGDORJ, chairman], Mongolian Social Democratic Party or MSDP [Radnaasumberliyn GONCHIGDORJ, chairman], Green Party [NYAM]; and Mongolian Democratic Party of Believers or MDPB [leader NA]); Mongolian Conservative Party or MCP [JARGALSAIHAN]; Democratic Power Coalition [D. BYAMBASUREN, chairman] (includes Mongolian Democratic Renaissance Party or MDRP [BYAMBASUREN, chairman] and Mongolian People's Party or MPP [leader NA]); Mongolian National Solidarity Party or MNSP [leader NA]; Bourgeois Party/Capitalist Party [VARGALSAIHAN, chairman]; United Heritage Party or UHP [B. JAMTSAI] (includes United Party of Herdsman and Farmers [leader NA], Independence Party [leader NA], Traditional United Conservative Party [leader NA], and Mongolian United Private Property Owners Party [leader NA]); Workers' Party [leader NA]

International organization participation: AsDB, ASEAN (observer), CCC, ESCAP, FAO, G-77, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICFTU, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, Intelsat, Interpol, IOC, ISO, ITU, OPCW, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WToO, WTrO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Jalbuugiyn CHOINHOR

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Flag description: three equal, vertical bands of red (hoist side), blue, and red; centered on the hoist-side red band in yellow is the national emblem ("soyombo"—a columnar arrangement of abstract and geometric representation for fire, sun, moon, earth, water, and the yin-yang symbol)

1.2.4 Economy

Economy—overview: The government has embraced free-market economics, freezing spending, easing price controls, liberalizing domestic and international trade. Mongolia's severe climate, scattered population, and wide expanses of unproductive land, however, have constrained economic development. Economic activity traditionally has been based on agriculture and the breeding of livestock. In past years, extensive mineral resources had been developed with Soviet support; total Soviet assistance at its height amounted to 30% of GDP, but disappeared almost overnight in 1990-91. The mining and processing of coal, copper, molybdenum, tin, tungsten, and gold account for a large part of industrial production. The Mongolian leadership has been soliciting support from foreign donors and economic growth picked up in 1997 and 1998 after stalling in 1996 due to a series of natural disasters and declines in world prices of copper and cashmere. Mongolia joined the World Trade Organization in 1997.

GDP: purchasing power parity—\$5.8 billion (1998 est.)

GDP—real growth rate: 3.5% (1998 est.)

GDP—per capita: purchasing power parity—\$2,250 (1998 est.)

GDP—composition by sector:

agriculture: 31%

industry: 35%

services: 34% (1997 est.)

Population below poverty line: 36.3% (1995 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 2.9%

highest 10%: 24.5% (1995)

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 6% (1998)

Labor force: 1.115 million (mid-1993 est.)

Labor force—by occupation: primarily herding/agricultural

Unemployment rate: 4.5% (1998)

Budget:*expenditures:* \$330 million (1998)**Industries:** copper, construction materials, mining (particularly coal); food and beverage, processing of animal products**Industrial production growth rate:** 4.5% (1997 est.)**Electricity—production:** 2.3 billion kWh (1996)**Electricity—production by source:***fossil fuel:* 100%*hydro:* 0%*nuclear:* 0%*other:* 0% (1996)**Electricity—consumption:** 2.681 billion kWh (1996)**Electricity—exports:** 0 kWh (1996)**Electricity—imports:** 381 million kWh (1996)**Agriculture—products:** wheat, barley, potatoes, forage crops; sheep, goats, cattle, camels, horses**Exports:** \$316.8 million (f.o.b., 1998)**Exports—commodities:** copper, livestock, animal products, cashmere, wool, hides, fluorspar, other nonferrous metals**Exports—partners:** China 30.1%, Switzerland 21.5%, Russia 12.1%, South Korea 9.7%, US 8.1% (1998)**Imports:** \$472.4 million (f.o.b., 1998)**Imports—commodities:** machinery and equipment, fuels, food products, industrial consumer goods, chemicals, building materials, sugar, tea**Imports—partners:** Russia 30.6%, China 13.3%, Japan 11.7%, South Korea 7.5%, US 6.9% (1998)**Debt—external:** \$500 million (1996 est.)**Economic aid—recipient:** \$250 million (1998 est.)**Currency:** 1 tughrík (Tug) = 100 mongos**Exchange rates:** tughrík (Tug) per US\$1—902 (January 1999), 840.83 (1998), 789.99 (1997), 548.40 (1996), 448.61 (1995), 412.72 (1994)**Fiscal year:** calendar year

1.2.5 Communications

Telephones: 93,600 (1998)**Telephone system:***domestic:* NA*international:* satellite earth station—1 Intersputnik (Indian Ocean Region)**Radio broadcast stations:** AM 12, FM 1, shortwave 0**Radios:** 220,000**Television broadcast stations:** 1 (in addition, there are 18 provincial repeaters) (1997)**Televisions:** 120,000 (1993 est.)

1.2.6 Transportation

Railways:*total:* 1,928 km*broad gauge:* 1,928 km 1.524-m gauge (1994)**Highways:***total:* 46,470 km*paved:* 3,730 km*unpaved:* 42,740 km (1997 est.)*note:* much of the unpaved rural road system consists of rough cross-country tracks**Waterways:** 397 km of principal routes (1988)**Ports and harbors:** none**Airports:** 34 (1994 est.)**Airports—with paved runways:***total:* 8*2,438 to 3,047 m:* 7*under 914 m:* 1 (1994 est.)**Airports—with unpaved runways:***total:* 26*over 3,047 m:* 3*2,438 to 3,047 m:* 5*1,524 to 2,437 m:* 10*914 to 1,523 m:* 3*under 914 m:* 5 (1994 est.)

1.2.7 Military

Military branches: Mongolian People's Army (includes Internal Security Forces and Frontier Guards), Air Force

Military manpower—military age: 18 years of age

Military manpower—availability:

males age 15-49: 702,141 (1999 est.)

Military manpower—fit for military service:

males age 15-49: 457,270 (1999 est.)

Military manpower—reaching military age annually:

males: 28,613 (1999 est.)

Military expenditures—dollar figure: \$20.3 million (1997)

Military expenditures—percent of GDP: 2% (1997)

1.3 *Lonely Planet - Destination Mongolia*

The name 'Mongolia' has always stirred up visions of the untamed and exotic - the warlord Genghis Khan, camels wandering in the Gobi Desert and wild horses galloping across the steppes. Even today, Mongolia seems like the end of the earth - outside Ulaan Baatar you begin to wonder if you haven't stepped into another century, rather than another country. It remains one of the last great adventure destinations in Asia.

Mongolia's survival as an independent nation is little short of miraculous. For the first time in centuries the Mongolians, once rulers of the vast Eurasian steppe, are no longer colonial subjects of the Russian and Chinese empires. Only a century ago, so few Mongolians were left that it seemed their ancient, nomadic civilisation might disappear altogether. Now the country has a constitution, multiparty elections and a ruling democratic coalition.

Travel in Mongolia can be hard but if you're ready for a tough, invigorating journey, grab your warmest winter coat, steady your stomach and steel your nerves. It's worth the wander into nomad's land.

1.3.1 Facts at a Glance

Area: 1,566,000 sq km (610,740 sq mi)

Population: 2.5 million

People: Khalkh Mongols (86%), Kazaks (6%), Chinese (2%), Russian (2%), about a dozen other ethnic groups

Languages: Mongolian, Turkic, Russian, Chinese

Religions: Tibetan Buddhism, Muslim, Shamanism

Government: Parliamentary democracy

President: Natsagiin Bagabandi

Prime Minister: Rinchinnyamiyn Amarjargal

1.3.2 Environment

Mongolia is a huge, landlocked country about 3 times the size of France, squashed between China and Russia. It was immeasurably bigger during the period of Mongol conquest under Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. Until the 20th century Mongolia was twice its present size and included a large chunk of Siberia and Inner Mongolia (now controlled by China). Mongolia is one of the highest countries in the world, with an average elevation of 1580m (5180ft). Its highest mountains are in the far west. The Mongol Altai Nuruu are permanently snowcapped, and their highest peak, Tavanbogd Uul (4370m/14,350ft), has a magnificent glacier that towers over Mongolia, Russia and China. Between the peaks are stark deserts where rain almost never falls. Elsewhere, Mongolia has numerous saltwater and freshwater lakes, the largest of which is the Khövsgöl Nuur, which contains 2% of the world's fresh water.

The southern third of Mongolia is dominated by the Gobi Desert. Although barren looking, it has enough grass to support scattered herds of sheep, goats and camels. Much of the rest of Mongolia is grassland, home to Mongolia's famed *takhi* horses, which Genghis Khan used so successfully in his wars of conquest.

Although it boasts over 260 sunny days a year and is known as the 'Land of Blue Sky', Mongolia's climate is extreme. Long subarctic winters are the norm and you can see snow in the Gobi Desert as late as April; some lakes remain frozen until June. There's a short rainy season from mid-July to September, but showers tend to be brief and gentle. Because of the high altitude, evenings are cool even in summer. In Ulaan Baatar, the winter (October to April) is long and cold, with temperatures dropping to -30°C (-22°F) in January and February. Horrific dust storms kick up during the short spring (May to June).

1.3.3 History

The Mongolians, or Mongols, as they were previously known, recorded their history for centuries in oral epics, sung by bards, until writing was introduced nearly 800 years ago. Because of their substantial - and mostly unhappy - contacts with neighbouring countries, much has also been written about the Mongolians. Chinese dynastic histories, stretching back 5000 years, tell of the Mongols and their predecessors, describing them as ravenous barbarians greedy for Chinese produce and likening them to wolves.

Archeological digs have uncovered human remains in the Gobi and other regions of Mongolia dating back nearly 500,000 years. Agriculture seems to have preceded nomadic herding of animals, and despite Mongolia's short summers, wheat growing

has co-existed with nomadic life for thousands of years. It was only after the Mongols tamed horses, yaks and camels that they took to a nomadic herding lifestyle.

The name 'Mongol' was first recorded by the Chinese during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD). At that time Mongolia was dominated by the Uighurs, a Turkic people who built several cities. The Uighurs were influenced by Christianity and, after taking control of Mongolia, went on to help out the ailing Tang rulers of China, saving them from an internal revolt. The Uighurs controlled most of Mongolia until 840 AD, when they were defeated by the Kyrgyz, who now live in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. The Kyrgyz' lasting legacy in Mongolia is the downward flowing script - the *Secret History* epic and all subsequent Mongolian texts were written in this script until Stalin forcibly replaced it with Russian Cyrillic in the 1940s. The Mongols had little inclination to ally with other nomadic peoples of northern Asia and, until the end of the 12th century, the Mongols were little more than a loose confederation of rival clans. It was in the late 12th century that a 20 year old Mongol named Temujin emerged and managed to unite most of the Mongol tribes. In 1189 he was given the honorary name of Genghis Khan, meaning 'universal king'. No Mongolian leader before or since has united the Mongolians so effectively.

The Genghis Khan imprinted in the memory of the west bears little relation to the Chinggis Khaan revered by Mongolians. Not only is the spelling different: to Europeans, his name lives on as the epitome of mercilessness and warmongering; to the Mongolians, he embodies strength, unity, law and order. He's the young king who united the warring clans, gathered a loyal army (up to 200,000 men), stamped out feuds and gave Mongolians a sense of direction. Genghis set up his capital in present-day Kharkhorin, and launched his important cavalry - built on Mongolia's prized *takhi* horses - against China and Russia. By the time of his death in 1227, the Mongol empire extended from Beijing to the Caspian Sea.

Genghis' grandson, Kublai Khan (circa 1216-94), completed the subjugation of China, ending the Song dynasty (960-1279) and becoming emperor of China's Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Kublai soon realised, though, that the Mongol empire had reached the limits of its expansion. Instead of looking for more wars to fight, Kublai concentrated on keeping the vast empire together. This was the height of the Mongols' glory: the empire stretched from Korea to Hungary and as far south as Vietnam, making it the largest empire the world has ever known. The Mongols improved the road system linking China with Russia and promoted trade throughout the empire and with Europe. Tens of thousands of horses were on standby to enable riders to cross the huge expanse of land with important messages at great speed.

In China, the Mongol Yuan dynasty instituted a famine relief scheme and expanded the canal system, which brought food from the countryside to the cities. It was the first to enforce paper money as the sole form of currency. This was the China that Marco Polo and other travellers visited and described in their journals to an amazed Europe. The grandeur of the Mongol empire in China lasted over a century. After Kublai Khan died in 1294, the Mongols became increasingly dependent on the people they ruled. They were deeply resented as an elite, privileged class exempt from taxation, and the empire became ridden with factions vying for power. The Mongols were expelled from Beijing by the first emperor of the Ming dynasty in the mid 14th century. The collapse of the Yuan dynasty caused over 60,000 Mongols to return to Mongolia. Their unity dissolved and frequent clan warfare and a long period of decline followed.

During the time of Mongolia's disarray, the Manchus, ancient enemies of the Mongols, established the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Despite their military prowess, the Manchus at first made no aggressive moves against Mongolia; they didn't need to - the Mongols were defeating themselves. The Zungar Mongols of the west were locked into a fierce military struggle with the Khalkha Mongols of the east. The Zungar seemed to be gaining the upper hand when the Khalkha made a fatal mistake. They invited the Manchu Qing emperor to send troops to fight their Zungar enemy. Like most Mongols, the Zungar warriors were highly skilled horseback archers. However, the Manchus possessed new technology which the Mongols couldn't combat - muskets and cannon. By 1732 the Zungar were resoundingly defeated and Mongolia came under the control of Manchu China. Manchu rule over China was competent and reasonably benign until around 1800; thereafter the Qing emperors became increasingly corrupt and despotic. In both China and Mongolia, peasants suffered ruthless exploitation, ruinous taxes and brutal punishment for the slightest offence: both were ripe for rebellion. In 1911 China's Qing dynasty crumbled. The Mongols quickly saw their opportunity and independence from China was declared on 1 December 1911, with a theocratic government under the leadership of the 8th Jebtzun Damba (Living Buddha). On 25 May 1915, the Treaty of Kyakhta, which granted Mongolia limited autonomy, was signed by Mongolia, China and Russia.

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 shocked Mongolia's aristocracy. Taking advantage of Russia's weakness, a Chinese warlord sent his troops into Mongolia in 1919 and occupied the capital. In early 1921, retreating White Russian anticommunist troops entered Mongolia and expelled the Chinese. The brutality of both the Chinese and Russian forces inflamed the Mongolians' desire for independence. As the Russian Bolsheviks were steadily advancing against the White Russian forces in Siberia, Mongolian nationalists asked the Bolsheviks for help. Together they recaptured Ulaan Baatar in July 1921. The country's Buddhist leader was retained as a figurehead and the newly formed Mongolian People's Party (the first political party in the country's history, and the only one for the next 69 years) took over the government.

On 26 November 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) was declared and Mongolia became the world's second communist country. Mongolian communism remained fairly independent of Moscow until Stalin gained absolute power in the late 1920s. Then the purges began. Stalin's stooge, Khorloogiyn Choibalsan, was selected to lead Mongolia. Following Stalin's lead, Choibalsan ordered the seizure of land and herds which were then redistributed to peasants. In 1932 more than 700 people, mostly monks, were imprisoned or murdered, their property seized and collectivized. Farmers were forced to join cooperatives and private business was banned, Chinese and other foreign traders were expelled, and all transport was nationalised.

The government's campaign against religion was particularly ruthless. In 1937 a reign of terror was launched against the monasteries in which thousands of monks were arrested and executed. It's believed that by 1939 some 27,000 people had been executed (3% of Mongolia's population at the time), 17,000 of whom were monks.

As the Soviet regime stagnated and faltered in the early 1980s, Mongolia came under the leadership of Jambyn Batmonkh, a decentraliser heartened by the Soviet reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev. Batmonkh instigated a cautious attempt at perestroika and glasnost (known as *il tod* in Mongolian) in 1986. By the late 1980s, relations with China even started to thaw and full diplomatic relations were established in 1989. The unravelling of the Soviet Union resulted in decolonisation by default. Few in Mongolia were ready for the speed of the collapse or prepared to seize the moment.

In March 1990, large pro-democracy protests erupted in the square in front of the parliament building in Ulaan Baatar and hunger strikes were held. Things then happened quickly: Batmonkh lost power; new political parties sprang up; and hunger strikes and protests continued. In May the government amended the constitution to permit multiparty elections in June 1990. Ironically, the communists won the elections. Although Ulaan Baatar residents gave much support to the opposition parties, rural areas voted overwhelmingly for the communists. The communist party announced it would share power with several young democrats. Freedom of speech, religion and assembly were all granted. Four years later, on 30 June 1996, the Mongolian Democratic Coalition unexpectedly trounced the ruling MPRP, ending 75 years of unbroken communist rule.

1.3.4 Economic Profile

GDP: US\$5 billion

GDP per head: US\$1970

Annual growth: 6%

Inflation: 53%

Major industries: Copper, livestock, cashmere, wool

Major trading partners: Former Soviet and Eastern European states, China, Austria

1.3.5 Culture

The Mongolian way of life is nomadic and intimately connected with the ways of animals. Despite urbanisation, the traditions of the steppes live on. Even in the cities, most Mongolians continue to live in a *ger*, a large, white felt tent that can be moved easily and has a universal layout: the door always faces south; towards the back and a little to the west is the place of honour set aside for guests; the back of the *ger*, the *khoimor*, is the place for elders and most treasured possessions; and on the back wall is the family altar, with Buddhist images, family photos and suitcases. Get a local to explain the dozens of traditional, religious and superstitious rules and customs associated with gers.

Mongolians have always taken wholeheartedly to Tibetan Buddhism and the links between Mongolia and Tibet are old and deep. Once in a lifetime, every devout Buddhist Mongolian tries to reach the holy city of Lhasa; the Tibetans in turn have relied on various Mongolian tribes to sustain their power. In Mongolia at the time of the communist takeover in 1921, there were 110,000 *lamas* (monks) living in about 700 monasteries. Beginning in the 1930s, thousands of monks were arrested, sent to Siberian labour camps and never heard from again. Monasteries were closed and ransacked and all religious worship and ceremonies outlawed. Not until 1990 was freedom of religion restored. Since then, there's been a phenomenal revival of Buddhism (and other religions). Monasteries have reopened, and even some ex-Communist Party officials have become lamas. Monasteries and temples (*süm*) always have Tibetan names. There's a significant minority of Sunni Muslims in the far western regions of Mongolia, most of whom are ethnic Kazaks.

Mongolia's paintings, music and literature are dominated by Tibetan Buddhism and nomadism. *Tsam* dances are performed to exorcise evil spirits and are influenced by nomadism and Shamanism. Outlawed during communism, they're beginning to be performed again. Traditional music involves a wide range of instruments and singing styles. In Mongolian *khoomi* singing, carefully trained male voices produce harmonic overtones from deep in the throat, releasing several notes at once. Traditional music and dance performances aren't complete without a touch of contortionism, an ancient Mongolian tradition.

Mongolian, the official language, is a member of the Ural-Altai family of languages, which includes Finnish, Turkish, Kazak, Uzbek and Korean. Since 1944, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet has been used to write Mongolian. The country has produced a huge literature, almost none of which is known to speakers of European languages. Only recently have scholars translated the most important text of all - *Mongol-un Nigucha Tobchiyan* (*The Secret History of the Mongols*) - which celebrates Mongolia's days of greatness.

An old Mongolian saying goes something like: 'Breakfast, keep for yourself; lunch, share with your friends; dinner, give to your enemies'. The biggest and most important meals for Mongolians are breakfast and lunch, which will usually consist of boiled mutton with lots of fat and flour and maybe some dairy products or rice. The Kazaks in western Mongolia add variety to their diet with horse meat. The Mongolians are big tea drinkers and the classic drink is *süütei tsai* (salty tea). Men who refuse to drink *arkhi* (vodka) are considered wimps, while herders make their own unique home brew *airag*, which is fermented horse's milk with an alcoholic content of about 3%. Many Mongolians distill it further to produce *shimiin arkhi*, which boosts the alcohol content to around 12%.

1.3.6 Events

The biggest event of the year is the **Naadam Festival**, known as the *eriyn gurban naadam*, after the three 'manly sports' of wrestling, archery and horse racing. The festival is held all over the country, normally between 11 and 13 July, the anniversary of the 1921 Mongolian Revolution. The major events take place during the first two days. **Tsagaan Sar** (White Month) is the start of the lunar new year in January or February. After months of enduring a bitter winter, Mongolians celebrate over three days with a lot of food, liquor and singing.

1.3.7 Facts for the Traveller

Visas: Entry and exit visas are required of all nationalities. To get a visa, visitors must be invited or sponsored by a Mongolian, a Mongolian company or a resident foreigner, or be part of an organised tour. Some consulates and embassies interpret the regulations more liberally than others. A visa costs around US\$25.

Health risks: Brucellosis, cholera, meningococcal meningitis, bubonic plague

Time: UTC/GMT plus 8 hours; UTC/GMT plus 7 hours in the western provinces of Bayan-Ölgii, Uvs and Khovd

Electricity: 220V, 50Hz

1.3.8 Money & Costs

Currency: tögrög (T or MNT)

Relative costs:

- Budget meal: US\$3-5
- Moderate restaurant meal: US\$5-10
- Top-end restaurant meal: US\$10-20
- Budget room: US\$5-10
- Moderate hotel: US\$10-20
- Top-end hotel: US\$20 and upwards

If you're travelling on an organised tour you'll probably spend about US\$100 a day. You can travel independently, see the same sights and stay in the same places for about US\$80 a day - a lot less if you share the cost of a private jeep and camp rather than stay in pricier *gers* (tents). Accommodation and food will cost at least US\$10 a day in Ulaan Baatar, but you're better off budgeting closer to double that. In the countryside, allow about US\$15 per day if you're using public transport and staying in hotels; if you take a tent and camp, you'll spend closer to US\$7 per day.

Bring US dollar travellers' cheques and have some US dollars in cash. Credit cards are handy at some hotels and at airline offices in Ulaan Baatar, but you won't be able to buy anything on credit outside the capital. For some unknown reason, US dollars dated before 1988 are unacceptable.

There's supposedly a mandatory 10% 'government' tax levied in Ulaan Baatar's posher restaurants and hotels, but most places either don't bother adding it onto the bill or haven't heard of the tax. Tipping is appreciated in upmarket restaurants. Bargaining is catching on in the public markets, but be prepared to pay more than Mongolians.

1.3.9 When to Go

The travel season is typically from May to early October, though Ulaan Baatar can be visited any time of year if you can tolerate the bitter cold. Early July has the best weather for the northern part of the country and is also the time to celebrate Mongolia's Naadam Festival. Be aware, though, that this is also when Ulaan Baatar's inadequate accommodation and creaky transport is stretched to the breaking point. June and September are both pleasant times to visit, and attract fewer visitors. The best months to visit the Gobi Desert and not get toasted are September and October. Be aware that between mid-October and mid-May sudden snowstorms and extreme cold can ground flights, block roads and cause the country's transport system to stall.

1.3.10 Attractions

1.3.10.1 Ulaan Baatar

Often called UB by foreigners, Mongolia's sleepy capital has the look and feel of a neglected 1950s European city. The old Soviet cars and buses are slowly being replaced by newer Japanese versions, but cows still wander the roads, goats sift through the rubbish, and traditionally dressed men and women mingle on the city's streets with Mongolia's nouveaux riche.

Built along the Tuul river and surrounded by lovely mountains, Ulaan Baatar is dominated by communist style highrise apartment buildings, but about 250,000 locals also live in the extended ger suburbs on the outskirts of town. The felt gers are protected from the winds, which are especially fierce in spring, by wooden fences. The topography makes for good hillside views overlooking the city, but during winter the view is obscured by pollution and temperatures are painfully freezing.

The centre of the city is **Sükhbaatar Square**. From this spot in July 1921 Damdiny Sükhbaatar, the 'hero of the revolution', declared Mongolia's independence from the Chinese. The square was also where the first protests were held in 1989 which eventually led to the fall of communism. On normal days, it's a serene place where only pigeons and peddling photographers do much of anything. The grey **State Parliament House** faces the square, as does the tall, modern **Palace of Culture**, a useful landmark containing the impressive **Mongolian Art Gallery** and other odes to Mongolian culture.

One block north-west of the square, the **Museum of Natural History** is worth a visit if you're heading into the countryside.

There are exhibits about Mongolia's geography, flora and fauna and some displays about recent Mongolian history. More impressive are the 2 complete dinosaur skeletons which were found in the Gobi - the giant flesh eating *Tarbosaurus* and its first cousin, the little duckbilled plant-eating *Sauroplophus*. The **Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts** has an excellent collection of paintings, carvings and sculptures, including many by the revered sculptor, artist and Buddhist, Zanabazar. It also contains other rare religious exhibits, such as *thangkas* (cloth paintings) and Buddhist statues.

Around the start of the 19th century, over 100 Tibetan Buddhist *sim* (temples) and *khiid* (monasteries) served a population of about 50,000 in Ulaan Baatar. Most of the temples and monasteries, along with their belongings, were destroyed during the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. **Gandantegchinlen Khiid** survived because the communists kept it as a showcase to impress foreigners. Roughly meaning 'the great place of complete joy', Gandan is one of Ulaan Baatar's most amazing sights. Within it are several glorious temples adorned with gold and jewels. The 150 or so monks who live here do their bit to bring the temples back to life with plenty of chanting and ceremonialising.

The **Winter Palace of Bogd Khaan** was also spared. Built between 1893 and 1903, it's where Mongolia's 8th Bogd Khaan (Living Buddha) and last king, lived for 20 years. Depending on which version of history you read, the Bogd Khaan either enjoyed irreverent pleasures of the flesh and bottle and was blind with syphilis, or he was a great visionary and nationalist. When he died in 1924, the Soviet-led communist government of Mongolia prohibited any future reincarnations, so there were no further Mongolian Buddhist leaders. The 6 temples on the grounds of the Winter Palace contain collections of gifts given the Bogd Khaan, including an extraordinary array of stuffed animals.

1.3.10.2 Four Holy Peaks

The 4 peaks surrounding Ulaan Bataar are considered holy. The Tsetseegum, Chingeltei, Songino Khaikhan and Bayansurkh mountains correspond, more or less, to the 4 points on the compass. These peaks are tremendous for hiking, and they're popular for their forests of larch trees, grasslands and stunning bird and animal life, including ibex and sable. **Tsetseegum Uul** is easily the most magnificent. At 2260m (7400ft), it's the highest point in the Bogdkhan Uul range, which dominates the skyline to the south of Ulaan Baatar. The trip is only sensible from the beginning of June to the end of September and a permit is required, which you can get at the entrance gate to the **Bogdkhan National Park**, about 15km (9mi) south of Ulaan Baatar. The **Manzshir Khiid Route** to Tsetseegum from the mountain's southern side is the easiest. Along it there are broad meadows, fields of rocky boulders and *ovoos* (pile of stones left as offerings to the gods). The **Zaisan Route** is the most scenic but also the most difficult, taking about 6 hours each way along precariously steep boulders. Anyway you go, along with the permit, you'll need a compass, plenty of water, food and cold weather gear, as sudden thunderstorms and icy winds can come out of nowhere even in summer.

1.3.10.3 Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve

The Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve was established in 1993 to preserve Mongolia's wild *takhi* horses and the steppe environment in which they live. The takhi is probably the most recognised and successful symbol of Mongolia's diverse and unique wildlife. Also known as Przewalski's horse (named after the Pole who first took an interest in them), the takhi used to roam the countryside in great herds. In the 1960s they almost became extinct because poachers killed them for meat, and because development and livestock overgrazing reduced their fodder. In the early 1990s, with assistance from international environmental groups, many takhi were reintroduced into specially protected areas in the 90,000ha (222,300acre) Khustain Nuruu and in the south Gobi. About 200 now live in this park or in the wild. The nature reserve is about 100km (62mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar. It's easiest to start your trip to Khustain from Zuunmod, 40km (25mi) south of Ulaan Baatar. There are daily buses, minibuses and shared taxis to Zuunmod from Ulaan Baatar. You'll need a jeep to reach the reserve from Zuunmod.

1.3.10.4 Kharkhorin (Karakorum)

In 1220 Genghis Khan decided to build the capital city of his vast Mongolian empire at Karakorum. Building was completed by his son, Ogedai Khan, after Genghis' death, but Karakorum served as the capital for only 40 years before Kublai Khan moved it to what is now Beijing. Following the move, and the subsequent collapse of the Mongolian empire, Karakorum was abandoned and then later destroyed by hordes of Manchurian soldiers. Whatever was left was used to help build the **Erdene Zuu** monastery in the 16th century, which itself was badly destroyed during the Stalinist purges. The modern and dreary town of Kharkhorin was built on the same spot.

Erdene Zuu (Hundred Treasures) was the first centre of Lamaism in Mongolia. The monastery was started in 1586 but not entirely finished until 300 years later. It has between 60 and 100 temples, about 300 gers set up inside the walls and, at its height, up to 1000 monks in residence. Like Karakorum, the monastery was abandoned and then vandalised by invading Manchurians. All but 3 of the temples in Erdene Zuu were destroyed by Stalin's thugs and an unknown number of monks killed. The monastery remained closed until 1965 when it was permitted to reopen as a museum, but not as a place of worship. Only with the collapse of communism did the monastery become active again.

Today it retains much of its former glory. Enclosed in an immense walled compound, the 3 temples within are dedicated to the 3 stages of a Buddha's life: as a child, adolescent and adult. The main, central temple is called the **Zuu of Buddha** and has statues of Buddha as a child. Outside the monastery walls are 2 '**turtle rocks**'. Four of these once marked the boundaries of ancient Karakorum. More, ahem, stimulating is the **phallic rock** hidden in a small valley among the hills overlooking the monastery, about 30 minutes away on foot. According to local tradition, all women who visit the rock must have sex within 24 hours.

Kharkhorin is 370km (230mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar. Between July and September there are flights between the cities several times a week. Year-round, buses make the 7-8 hour trip just as often.

1.3.10.5 Khövsgöl Nuur

Try to imagine a 2760 sq km (1080 sq mi) alpine lake, with water so pure you can drink it. Then add dozens of 2000m (6560ft) mountains, thick pine forests and lush meadows with grazing yaks and horses, and you have a vague impression of Khövsgöl Nuur, Mongolia's top scenic heartstopper. This is the deepest lake in Central Asia, and the world's 14th largest source of fresh water. Situated along the border with Russia, the lake is sacred to local Mongolians, who refer to it as 'mother'. It's full of fish and the area is home to sheep, ibex, bear and moose, as well as over 200 species of birds. There are numerous caves around the lake, though they're hard to find without a guide. Three separate peoples live in the area: Darkhad Mongols, Buryats and Tsaatan.

An amazing 90 rivers flow into the lake, but only a single river flows out - the Egiin Gol, which ultimately reaches Lake Baikal in Siberia. Khövsgöl Nuur freezes in winter, allowing huge trucks carrying fuel to cross from Siberia. Visitors can kayak on the lake when it unfreezes, and hike or ride on horseback (or yakback) around it.

The southern boundary of Khövsgöl Nuur is about 775km (480mi) north-west of Ulaan Baatar and is reachable by occasional plane, bus or your own jeep. The best time to visit is in spring (around April and May), though. It's still very cold at this time and the lake may be frozen. The summer (July and August) is warmer but more crowded. Permits are required to visit the lake. They're available on the main road into Khövsgöl Nuur National Park, a few km before the southern entrance at the town of Khatgal.

1.3.11 Off the Beaten Track

1.3.11.1 Amarbayasgalant Khiid

After Erdene Zuu Khiid in Kharkhorin, Amarbayasgalant Khiid is considered the most important monastery in Mongolia. It's also one of the most beautiful. Situated in northern central Mongolia, Amarbayasgalant Khiid was originally built in 1737 by the Manchurian king Kansu, who dedicated it to the great Mongolian Buddhist and sculptor, Zanabazar. The communists found their way here in the 1930s and destroyed 10 of the 37 temples and statues. These days the temples are normally closed but you can ask the head monk to open them and you're welcome to watch the 30 resident monks conduct their daily ceremonies.

A daily bus and frequent express trains link Ulaan Baatar and Darkhan, which is 219km (136mi) north-west of the capital. The monastery is 140km (87mi) south-east of Darkhan; you'll need a jeep to reach the monastery from Darkhan.

1.3.11.2 Gurvansaikhan National Park

Unlike other national parks in the **Gobi Desert**, the Gurvansaikhan contains notable attractions, and the facilities - ger camps and roads - are reasonably good. The park contains mountains, dinosaur fossils, extraordinary sand dunes, rock formations and a valley that has ice for most of the year. The park is home to over 200 species of birds, including the Mongolian Desert Finch, Cinerous Vulture, Desert Warbler and Houbara Bustard. The sparse vegetation manages to support black-tailed gazelle, snow leopard, ibex, argali sheep and endangered species of wild camel. A small permit fee is collected at the gate to the **Yolyn Am** valley, where there's also a small museum of stuffed animals.

Many foreigners regard the Gobi as a remote, exotic and mystical place. While it is some of those things, it's mainly grass, shrubs and rocks: oases and sand cover only about 3% of the desert. It is, however, a land of extremes: decent rain falls only every 2 to 3 years, and it can be well over 40°C (105°F) during summer and below -40°C (-40°F) in winter; storms of dust and sand can be fearsome in spring.

Gurvansaikhan is 340km (211mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar, near the town of Dalanzadgad and not far from the Chinese border. Most travelers to the Gobi fly into Dalanzadgad and then rent a jeep. There's also a weekly bus between Ulaan Baatar and Dalanzadgad.

1.3.11.3 Khovd

Once a small farming community, and later a centre for Russian and Mongolian trading, Khovd city is now a major industrial centre and a good place from which to start exploring western Mongolia. At the northern end of the city are the rapidly disappearing **Sangiin Kherem** ruins, built in about 1762 by the Manchu warlords who once conquered, and brutally governed, Mongolia. The walled compound was completely abandoned after the 1911 Chinese Revolution overthrew the last emperor. The dry, rugged hills north of the ruins offer some great views and good hiking.

Khovd is 1425km (884mi) west of Ulaan Baatar via a westward bus route that travels through Arvaikheer, Bayankhongor and Altai. There are regular flights from Ulaan Bataar to Khovd and, once there, you can rent jeeps for jaunts into the surrounding countryside.

1.3.12 Activities

The Four Holy Peaks surrounding Ulaan Bataar offer challenging **hiking** and breathtaking views. Manzshir Khiid Route on the Tsetseegum peak's southern side is the easiest route up; Zaisan Route is the most scenic and most difficult. There's more hiking in Gurvansaikhan National Park, around the hills of Khovd, and in the Gobi Desert. Huge Khövsgöl Nuur lake is a nirvana for **fishing** and **kayaking** and there's some **spelunking** to be done in lakeshore caves. January and February are good months for

skiing. Downhill and crosscountry ski tours leave from Ulaan Bataar. Relive Genghis Khan's glory days by grabbing a **horse, camel or yak** for a **ride** in and around Ulaan Baatar.

1.3.13 Getting There & Away

Most people fly into Ulaan Baatar from Beijing, Berlin or Moscow. Organised tours also operate flights from Osaka and Seoul. The international Mongolian carrier is MIAT, which some wags claim stands for 'Maybe I'll Arrive Today'. Delayed and cancelled flights are common partly due to frequent poor weather conditions. The airport departure tax is around US\$10. The only other way foreigners can enter and leave Mongolia is on the Trans-Mongolian Railway linking Beijing and Moscow. Border crossings are at Ereen-Zamyn-Üüd on the Chinese-Mongolian border, and Naushki-Sükhbaatar on the Russian-Mongolian border. Some travellers have reported crossing into Mongolia from Russia and China by jeep or bus, but technically this is still illegal.

1.3.14 Getting Around

A vast, sparsely populated country with little infrastructure, Mongolia relies heavily on air transport. There are over 80 airports, few of which have paved runways. MIAT, the major internal airline, has flights to most of the provincial capitals, major cities and tourist destinations - but not all of them. Schedules change regularly, foreigners pay several times more than Mongolians for tickets and there's no computerised reservation system, so you can't buy a return ticket at the same place you purchase an outgoing one.

Buses are an increasingly popular way of travelling around the country, but services are still limited, the buses old and the journeys uncomfortable and slow. Also, bus drivers are occasionally drunk and breakdowns can be expected on all long distance trips. Bus routes start and end in Ulaan Bataar and no buses travel around western Mongolia. Slightly more expensive minibuses that travel between popular spots are quicker and more comfortable. Mongolia's 1750km (1090mi) railway is made up of a north-south line, which is part of the Trans-Mongolian Railway, connecting China with Russia.

Taxis are only useful along paved roads - ie, not that useful since only 1200km (744mi) of road out of a total of 47,000km (29,150mi) are paved. Jeeps are an important form of transport on the unpaved majority, and mandatory when visiting remote attractions. Jeeps tend to be slow and mechanically fragile. Usually they come with a driver and/or guide and, if it's a public jeep, with other passengers. Travelling around in your own jeep is not a good idea, though you can drive with an international driving license. Be aware that petrol can be hard to find; accidents, unfortunately, are not.

1.4 *Lonely Planet - Travellers' reports on Mongolia*

The information below is provided by Lonely Planet readers and is **not verified by Lonely Planet**. For the official lowdown, contact your nearest embassy or check out our [travel advice](#).

1.4.1 Visas, Embassies & Border Crossings

The Mongolia-China border at Zamyn-Uud-Erlian is closed on weekends. You cannot take the public bus across the border until Monday morning (it runs twice daily at 9 am and 1 pm - you should get there at least two hours beforehand as tickets sell quickly to Mongolian traders). We discovered this the hard way, arriving in Erlian on Saturday, having to deal with frustrating Chinese border guards and also having to find something to do for the next day and a half. The latter problem was solved by some new found Mongolian friends and vodka.

Andrea Hampton, USA (Jan 00)

Obtaining a transit Mongolian visa in Moscow is debatably the easiest visa you'll ever apply for. Business hours are flexible and necessary documents are few. Bring US\$30 and a photo and you should be in and out in half an hour.

Anna J Piller, USA (Sep 99)

If you are an individual traveller and want to stay longer than your visa permits, then you need an invitation letter to extend your stay. Otherwise, the Ministry of External Relations in Ulaan Baatar won't accept your visa extension form. Yes, it is so ridiculous that they issue Mongolian visas to individual tourists abroad without an invitation letter, but when it comes to extending in UB, the letter is a must. I think the travel agencies in UB can organise these letters. One working day is required for getting your visa extended after you've submitted all the necessary forms.

Hyun-mi, Jeon, Hong Kong (Jul 99)

Crossing the China-Mongolia border by bus is now possible. I managed to cross the border from Erenhot or Erlianhot (city) into Zamyn-Uud without a hitch. It's only a very short distance but the trip takes all day due to the Chinese customs and formalities about crossing into Mongolia. It's very disorganised but the locals seemed to have a fair idea about what was going on.

Danny Williams, Australia (Mar 99)

We went to Mongolia on the 36 hour international train from Beijing. Our travel agent in Tel Aviv told us that we didn't need a visa for Mongolia, that they were issued at the border. Sounded reasonable to us because that's how it works in Israel. After changing the bogies of the train on the border, which took about five hours, we arrived in the small Mongolian border town at about 2 am and upon the presentation of our passports were told to get off the train because we didn't have visas! All our arguing was to no avail and we found ourselves on the train platform in a tiny town in the Gobi Desert in the middle of the night. There are three very small hotels in that town but they either didn't have free rooms or wouldn't open for us. The chief border policeman had sort of taken responsibility for us and ended up taking us home to his house to sleep!

Everything was very vague, but to make a long story short, the next day we were taken in a police jeep back to China where we were handed over to the Chinese border police and were able to get a Mongolian visa there. We had to buy new train tickets to Ulaan Baatar and arrived there about two and a half days late. Later we found out that there were people who received visas at the border and that apparently Israelis don't need visas at all! So in other words, things are very unclear there, but you would be wise to get your visa ahead of time in any case.

Judy Pex, Israel (Feb 99)

1.4.2 Travel Tips

To make an international phone call in Kharkorin, make your way to the post office at the edge of town. It's easy to recognise as it is a three storey yellow building with a satellite dish on the roof and goats running in and out. Go to the second floor where you'll find a lady behind a huge antique telephone switchboard. She speaks no English so just gesture and she'll give you paper to write the number down. Watching her make the call is fascinating - it's a bit expensive but the line was very clear.

Tycho de Feijter, The Netherlands (Sep 99)

Seeing as nomadic children don't have access to education these days, ideal gifts to bring into the country are Mongolian children's books. There's a good selection of these on the first floor of the State Department Store in UB. We found a really excellent Mongolian language children's atlas and science book, as well as a book of traditional Mongolian children's stories. Travellers should be encouraged to bring books with them for the children, but not the Mongolian translations of Walt Disney stories - there's enough American crap around the world; we don't need to spread any more.

Patrik Parkes, Canada (Jul 99)

If fishing in Mongolia, it is a legal requirement to have a permit to fish in every national park and soum. The permits need to be purchased from park rangers. Enforcement of this law varies from location to location depending on the local rangers: most do not speak English and the potential for corruption is huge. The best defence against this is to have a Mongolian guide with you or try and contact someone at the Ministry of the Environment as they have English speaking staff.

Hilary Anne Exon, USA (May 99)

Beware when arranging local transport to Tsetserleg, the capital of Arhangai province. You'd be surprised how many towns bear the same name. In Moron, I was looking for a jeep to Tsetserleg and specified, in Mongolian, that I wanted to go to the Tsetserleg in Arkhangai, not the one in Huuvsgul province. We did get to Arkhangai province, but at 2 am, found ourselves in an obscure town which turned out to be Tsetserleg somon, not Tsetserleg aimaging tov, both in Arkhangai.

Karen Harmatuk, Canada (Jan 99)

1.4.3 Moving About

In Ulaan Baatar the domestic railway office has moved to the railway station itself. It's a brand new building on the east-side of the station and entrance is via two black stairways. Inside is a huge destination table in Cyrillic. If you want to leave the same day, buy your ticket on the first floor; for reservations visit the second floor.

Tycho de Feijter, The Netherlands (Sep 99)

1.4.4 Gems, Highlights & Attractions

I definitely recommend learning how to read Cyrillic. If you do, you can find some things on your own. I had studied Russian in college and even though I've forgotten most of the language, I can still read the alphabet. As a result, when I was walking around on my own one day, I came across a small building with a sign on it in Cyrillic. I took a closer look and found that it said 'Museum'. Since I love museums and plan trips by how many cultural places of interest there are in a city, I had to investigate and find out what kind of museum. It turned out to be a museum to honor Natsagdorj, the major Mongolian poet/author/playwright of the 1930s and 1940s. A man came out and asked if I spoke English and after I said yes, I got a guided tour by the museum director with this man as interpreter. Wonderful! The museum show-cased his family background, his studies, his time in the USSR and it had some of his works displayed and many artefacts that he used, such as the typewriter he wrote on. It is located near the Chojin Lama Temple and Museum, and is very close to the park that is nearby.

Susan L Schwartz, USA (Mar 98)

1.4.5 Yarns, Fables & Anecdotes

We took the Trans-Mongolian railroad from Beijing, which was hugely fun. Our sleeping compartment was cosy and charming; our neighbours congenial. Going through customs lasted from 9 pm to 1 am with four searches of each compartment and every crevice of the train. Because the USSR feared invasion by train, Soviet and Mongolian train tracks are wider than those used by everyone else in the world. At the border, we had to change the entire wheel system of the train. This involved getting off the train while each car was separated and jacked up for a wheel change.

John's first sight in the Gobi Desert the next morning was a rainbow; mine was a pair of camels. For a long time we didn't see much else but the tawny, undulating earth and the vast sky above. This landscape was actually mesmerising; I found it hard to turn my eyes away. From time to time we passed horses, sheep, more camels, dead cattle, an occasional person and a few gers (the white yurt-like tents in which the nomads live). We saw several cranes and lots of birds we couldn't identify.

Ulaan Baatar reminds us both of Phnom Penh minus the tropical flowers. It was once a functioning city, but when Soviet support for Mongolia ended, UB fell into very hard times. Sidewalks contain as much rubble as pavement. The ceiling of the main bank is falling apart. Parks feature weeds and decrepit metal playground equipment. But it's not all grim: tall conifers

line the streets and there are some very elegant European-style buildings. Mongolia calls itself . The Land of Blue Skies. and the celestial aspect of this place is truly impressive: there is light from 4.30 am to 9.30 pm.

There is never a dull moment in UB. One of the things we had hoped to do while in the capital was to hear a performance of throat singing. Within an hour of our arrival, while walking to the bank to change money, the man behind us was casually throat singing the way I might whistle. We also saw a spectacular performance that had more throat singing, music, dance and a contortionist whose grand finale had her wrapped in an unimaginable position with hands and feet in the air, holding herself off the ground with her mouth!

I thought we might see a yak in Mongolia if we were lucky. And we have been very lucky: we slept in a ger (yurt) beside nine yaks and their fluffy calves. All night they snorted and murmured through their green dreams. We watched our ger-keeper milk them and consumed yoghurt, tea and cheese made from their sweet, rich milk.

John & Deborah Lerme Goodman, USA (Jun 99)

The best way to experience the Mongolian spirit is to make a long distance journey by a public van/jeep. The driver usually takes short cuts and drives like Mad Max through really beautiful surroundings. Even though the journey is bone rattling, the soulful singing of the Mongolian passengers will soothe your discomforts. You may need a lot of time and patience though. The Mongols have no respect for time. When they stop to say hello to another Mongolian, they take inordinate time talking. It might seem like eternity, but be patient ... for example, I took the public jeep from Ulaan Baatar to Dalanzadgad in the South Gobi. Ordinarily it should take 12 hours, but it took 60 hours to reach the destination. The jeep had no part that I could consider to be in good shape. The suspension broke loose every few hours. The engine would not start when stopped. We had three flat tyres. And the scariest part was getting stuck in the sand at the edge of the Gobi when it was getting dark. But despite all the problems, the resourcefulness of the driver and the passengers made us continue our journey. In between, I enjoyed the extraordinary hospitality of a nomadic family in a Ger for two nights when we had jeep problems.

Rao Talasila, USA (Nov 97)

2 FAQ

2.1 *Normandic Expedition*

2.1.1 Why would I want to visit Mongolia?

Mongolia offers a unique cultural experience: nomadic herdsmen who pack their tent-like gers on camelback and travel across the land; horse-riders who gallop across the vast steppe as was done during the time of Chingis Khan; and monasteries where Tibetan Buddhism is once again openly practiced. Mongolia's pristine environment, unique and exotic culture, breathtakingly beautiful landscapes, and fascinating history make it an ideal destination for those seeking an uncommon experience. To learn more, read our [About Mongolia](#) section

2.1.2 Is Mongolia safe?

Based on their history, one might expect modern Mongolians to be aggressive and unfriendly to outsiders and strangers. Nothing could be further from the truth. The same harsh conditions that make nomadic existence so precarious and challenging have dictated the need for uncommon hospitality and warmth extended to all travelers and pilgrims encountered in one's own vicinity. It is firmly implanted into every Mongolian's beliefs, whether he or she is a city dweller or herder, that the courtesy extended today to a stranger will be repaid in the future when the situation is reversed, and that the welcome offered to a visitor into one's home is the same that you can expect when you are the guest. This is the basis for Mongolian civilization and the cornerstone of Mongolian culture that is intertwined throughout its institutions and customs.

Of course, there are inherent dangers in travel to any destination, and particularly a remote country like Mongolia. Please ask us if you have any questions about trip itineraries or scheduled activities.

2.1.3 When is the best time of the year to go to Mongolia and what is the weather like?

Mongolia has a relatively cool climate with short, mild summers and long, severe winters. One of the unique and exciting aspects of travel to Mongolia is that you can sometimes experience all four seasons within one day. The best time to travel to Mongolia is from early June through the end of September, when travelers can expect an average range in temperature from 50° to 80° F. Mongolia has approximately 260 cloudless days a year, hence its reputation for endless blue skies. The rainy season extends from mid-July to August, but showers are usually brief. Because Mongolia is located far from any oceans, the humidity is very low. If your schedule only permits that you can travel from October through mid-May, please note that ger camps are closed and excursions are limited to the capital city and its immediate environs.

Average Temperatures (Fahrenheit):

May: 30°-55° August: 40°-70°

June: 40°-70° September: 35°-60°

July: 50°-70° October: 20°-45°

To check the current weather in Ulaanbaatar, [click here](#).

2.1.4 What are the ports of entry into Mongolia?

The two most common ports of entry into Mongolia are by plane via Seoul, Korea and Beijing, China. However, it is also possible to fly to Mongolia from Berlin, Germany, Moscow or Irkutsk, Russia and Osaka, Japan. A portion of the Trans-Siberian Rail also runs through Mongolia, so it is also possible to take the train from either Beijing or Irkutsk to Ulaanbaatar.

2.1.5 What forms of transportation are used for traveling within Mongolia?

Land transportation:

In the capital city and surrounding areas, we use buses, minivans and 4-wheel-drive vehicles. In the countryside, we use 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Outside of the capital, there are almost no paved roads just simply dirt tracks that are very bumpy, and dusty or muddy. Therefore, it can take several days of driving from Ulaanbaatar to reach destinations such as Lake Hovsgol or the Gobi. Some of our clients enjoy overland expeditions and appreciate the chance to experience the vast landscapes of Mongolia with the flexibility to stop and meet local families along their route. However, other clients prefer to fly to a destination and then use 4-wheel-drive vehicles to explore that destination. Please consider carefully which type of travel you prefer.

Air transportation:

Aircraft used for domestic and chartered flights are Russian Antonov-24 propeller planes and Russian military MI-8 helicopters, converted to civilian use.

2.1.6 What type of accommodations are available in Mongolia?

Hotels:

In the capital, you will stay in Ulaanbaatar's best hotels. These are comfortable tourist hotels and include in-room, western-style toilet and shower facilities, televisions with access to CNN, minibars, laundry service, and room service. All travel in Mongolia includes overnights in Ulaanbaatar, whether on arrival and departure or as the central hub for domestic flights.

Ger Camps:

Outside the capital, we are able to achieve a wonderful balance between nature and comfort with the use of ger camps. Traditional gers are the moveable, domed structures used by nomads for centuries. Made of a latticed wood structure covered with layers of felt and canvas, each ger is heated by a wood stove and furnished with beautifully painted wood-framed beds. Western-style toilet facilities and showers are located in a central building. These camps provide an authentic and memorable taste of Mongolian culture and allow you to visit areas which otherwise lack traveler accommodations. Most visitors find their stays in the ger camps to be among their most enjoyable experiences in Mongolia.

Tent Camps:

For our more off-the-beaten-path trips, we set up tent camps each day which allow us to visit even the most remote areas of the country. Our experienced field personnel set up camp with high quality, large three-person tents for every two people, outfitted with sleeping bags and self-inflating sleeping mats. A central dining tent is provided for groups and food is prepared by a field cook.

2.1.7 What types of food will I be eating in Mongolia?

Mongolian food reflects the influence of Russia and China. Dairy products, breads and meat (primarily mutton and beef) form the basis of the Mongolian diet. Some typical dishes include: *shorlog* (Mongolian Barbecue or shish kebab), *horhog* (roasted sheep), *buuz* (steamed dumplings with mutton or beef), and *guriltai shol* (mutton noodle soup). Food is generally oilier than you may be used to. Noodles, rice and/or breads are likely to be a part of most meals. Although vegetables and fruits are not widely cultivated or consumed in Mongolia, most meals are also likely to include potatoes, carrots, cabbage, cucumbers and/or tomatoes. Fruit is usually canned.

In general, it is difficult to accommodate special needs such as vegetarian or low fat diets because an import market for tourists is only now developing. If you are uncomfortable eating unfamiliar foods, or feel you will need foods to supplement your nutritional needs (e.g. non-meat based protein), it may be useful to bring your own snacks such as Ramen noodles, crackers, peanut butter, dried fruit, cans of tuna fish, biscuits, etc.

2.1.8 What sorts of activities are available and how do I know which trip will provide me with the activity level I desire?

Our trips cover a wide range of activity levels, which we have roughly broken down to three levels:

Level 1:

Overland drives are minimized, although you may travel up to 3 hours on certain days. Activity levels are based on your preference, with itineraries that let you walk as little or as much as you prefer.

Level 2:

Includes extended driving times in four-wheel-drive vehicles (up to 6-8 hours per day) on unpaved roads in the countryside. Activity levels are based on personal preference with options for hiking, kayaking, horse-riding, camel trekking, etc.

Level 3:

Trips are activity based and range from hiking to kayaking to horseriding. Participants should be in good physical shape and have the skills and proficiency necessary to take part in the physical activities. These journeys may also include extended driving times.

While kayaking, your equipment will include quality one- and two-person Folbot expedition kayaks. Some kayaking experience is strongly recommended, but these kayaks are highly stable, and can provide hours of enjoyment even for the beginning paddler.

While horsetrekking, you will be riding Mongolian horses, generally smaller than you may be used to, but legendary for their sturdy build, great stamina and ability to negotiate difficult terrain. We will provide traditional Russian cavalry-style saddles for each participant. Some riding experience is necessary but non-riders need only complete a basic riding course prior to the trip.

While camel trekking, you will be riding Bactrian (two-humped) camels. Bactrians are easier to ride than horses and no prior experience is necessary in order to enjoy the experience.

2.1.9 What is the medical care like in Mongolia?

In the countryside, there are no medical facilities and, while medical facilities are available in Ulaanbaatar, standards and methods of treatments are not the same as ours. Therefore, the prospect of illness or hospitalization while in Mongolia should not be taken lightly. If you have a serious medical problem or a medical condition which might be adversely affected by strenuous travel, please contact us so we may provide more precise information. Since serious illness or accidents involving serious injury are best treated at a Western medical facility, and since emergency medical evacuation can be extremely expensive, we highly recommend that travelers to remote destinations such as Mongolia obtain travel insurance which includes emergency evacuation coverage. This insurance covers the cost of emergency transportation if an accident or illness during the trip requires you to be transported to medical care or to return home.

2.1.10 What is the average price of a trip to Mongolia?

Prices for our Expedition Series trips range from \$1,800 to \$3,500 for trips lasting 10 to 18 days. We firmly believe in the benefits of small group travel, both for travelers and for the environment and culture of the destination country. In order to operate our trips for small groups, we price our trips according to group size. Therefore, each trip will list various prices based on group size.

For customized adventures, please be advised that pricing can vary depending on a number of factors including the total number of people traveling, number of domestic flights, overland distances covered, scheduled activities, and length of trip.

2.1.11 Can children participate in a trip to Mongolia?

We are more than happy to arrange programs for families including younger children. Please call to discuss the specifics of any of our trips to see if the program in which you are interested would be appropriate for children.

What documents do I need to enter Mongolia?

In order to enter Mongolia, you will need a Mongolian visa and a passport valid for at least six months past the last day of your adventure. After we receive your Trip Application Form and deposit, we will send you a predeparture packet with information on Mongolian visas and visa application forms from Zierer Visa Service, a professional visa service agency. Alternatively, you can download the [application form](#) from the Web and apply for a Mongolian visa directly with either the Mongolian Mission to the United Nations in New York or the Embassy of Mongolia in Washington D.C.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are arriving in Mongolia via Beijing, you will also need a double-entry Chinese visa for entry into China. If you are arriving in Mongolia via Seoul, you will only need a valid passport for entry into Korea.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MONGOLIA

2.1.12 What type of government is in power?

In 1990, Mongolia underwent a peaceful transition to a liberal democracy after 70 years of communism. In February 1992, the newly-created constitution officially changed the country's name from the Mongolian People's Republic to "Mongolia." This new constitution also guarantees democracy, justice, freedom, equality and national unity for Mongolian people.

2.1.13 What is "inner" and "outer" Mongolia?

These terms were used by the Chinese with "outer" Mongolia being the area furthest from Beijing and "inner" Mongolia being the area closest to Beijing. "Outer" Mongolia is now the official country of Mongolia while "inner" Mongolia is an autonomous region in China.

2.1.14 What language is spoken in Mongolia?

The official language is Khalka Mongolian, a member of the Altaic group of languages. Russian remains the most widely spoken foreign language, but this is changing as other languages, such as English and Japanese are gaining in popularity.

2.1.15 What currency is used in Mongolia?

The basic monetary unit is the togrog, however, US dollars are readily accepted in most stores.

What is the size of Mongolia?

Covering a land area of 604,250 square miles (approximately twice the size of Texas or the size of Western Europe), Mongolia is the fifth largest country in Asia and the seventeenth largest country in the world. With a population of approximately 2.4

million, the overall population density of the country is only 4 persons per square mile. The country is divided into 18 provinces. The three largest cities are Ulaanbaatar, the capital, with a population of half a million people; Darhan; and Erdenet.

2.1.16 What is the main religion practiced in Mongolia?

Tibetan Buddhism, although suppressed from 1929 until 1990, is undergoing a revival within Mongolia. Traditionally, Shamanism is also practiced in Mongolia.

2.2 *Mongolia FAQ*

2.2.1 Land, People, Language

2.2.1.1 Where do Mongolians live?

Mongolians live in:

- Mongolia proper, the huge, land-locked country between China and the Siberian part of the Russian Federation (see also the Mongolia Fact File, URL <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~corff/im/Landeskunde/ciamong>)
- Southern Mongolia, or Inner Mongol Autonomous Region which politically belongs to China;
- There are about 600,000-700,000 Mongols living in western Liaoning province. Most of them are Kharchin Mongols and the land they are living formerly called Zosot Aimag. Now there are still two Mongol Autonomous Counties in Liaoning;
- There are about 150,000 Mongols living in western Jilin province. Most of them are Khorchin Mongols. They form one Mongol autonomous county there;
- There are about 160,000 Mongols living in southwest Heilongjiang province. Most of them are Khorchin Mongols. There is one Mongol autonomous county in Heilongjiang. However, there are also four or five thousands of Kalmyks (Oirat) living in Yimin County (formerly the Ikh Mingan Banner). They were moved to the present area in early 18th century by the Qing government;
- Buryatia, direct north of Mongolia proper, south and south-east of Lake Baikal. Buryatia is an Autonomous Republic, the capital is Ulaan-Üüd (Ulan-Ude) (see also Buryatia Fact File in Infosystem Mongolei);
- An important number of Mongols who are known as Kalmyks live in Russia in Kalmykia, the capital being Elista. Kalmyks are also known as Oirats;
- In Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, there are also Kalmyks holding strong ties with their brethren in Kalmykia. Yet even among the Oirats, groups are differentiated which has a strong political repercussion even today. There are also some Chahar Mongols in Xinjiang, and they may not consider themselves belonging to the mainstream Oirat, but be

2.2.2 Administrative

2.2.2.1 I want to travel to Mongolia. What kind of travel documentation do I need?

You must obtain a visa at a Mongolian embassy or consulate. (See below for a list of embassies / consulates). In order to obtain a visa for stays of one month or longer you must produce an invitation issued by a) a Mongolian private person or b) a Mongolian institution. This may be a university. Once you have entered Mongolia various regulations on registering with police may apply depending on the length and nature of your stay. It is more than highly recommended to observe the registration procedure since you may risk being denied exit from the country upon presenting your passport at the airport without the proper police registration stamps. You also risk being fined somewhere in the area of USD 100.-- upon exiting Mongolia when disobeying the mandatory registration rule. Persons staying on official visa (category ``A") should turn to their official host (university, government ministry, etc.) for assistance. For details, ask your Mongolian embassy when receiving the visa.

2.2.2.2 I want to travel to Inner Mongolia. What kind of travel documentation do I need?

You need a visa issued by the authorities of the People's Republic of China. Once in China (and Inner Mongolia) you'll be requested to register at a hotel etc. by using the forms available there. Various other procedures may apply depending on length and nature of your stay.

2.2.3 Tourism

2.2.3.1 How to travel to Mongolia?

The principal ways to Mongolia are by train and by air. The capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, is connected via the Transmongolian Railway to China and Buryatia. In Ulan Ude, capital of Buryatia, the Transsiberian Railway (leading from Moscow to the Russian Far East, Khabarovsk, Nakhodka etc.) connects to the Transmongolian Railway. Trains from Moscow to Beijing run once a week in each direction and take about five days for the whole trip. There are also 'local trains' between Irkutsk (Ärxüü) and Ulaanbaatar which take about 24 hours one way. Similar local trains run between Ulaanbaatar and Beijing.

Since the Transmongolian Railway sports only one track this is a bottleneck for railway traffic which results in these one train/week schedules. Prices for train tickets vary between USD 200 and USD 500. It is not possible to state any exact amount because prices fluctuate, the currency exchange rates vary daily and pricing policies create different price tags depending on where the tickets are purchased. Further information can be consulted at [Trans-Siberian Train Schedules and Prices](http://206.13.127.134/bus/wnights/trans-siberian.html) (<http://206.13.127.134/bus/wnights/trans-siberian.html>)

The second feasible way to enter Mongolia is by air. Air transport is available between Buyant Uxaa (the international airport of Ulaanbaatar) and Beijing as well as Irkutsk, the latter with a weekly connect flight to Moscow (or should I say, it's a weekly flight to Moscow with a stop-over in Irkutsk?). These lines are served throughout the whole year. In summer, there are additional flights to Huhhot (Inner Mongolia) and Japan, the latter being served on a somewhat irregular basis. Past experience has shown that these links were just chartered flights without a genuine "schedule" in the sense of the word. There are about four to six international passenger flights per week connecting Ulaanbaatar and the rest of the world. Links to other Central Asian regions are under consideration or offered on a seasonal basis such as a flight between Almaty / Kazakhstan and Mongolia. A new route has recently been opened between Buyant Uxaa and Seoul, Korea (spring 1996). The latest developments (fall 1996) include an air link between Buyant Uxaa / Ulaanbaatar and Germany, Berlin Schoenefeld (code SXF - important because there are two other public airports in Berlin: Tegel (TXL) and Tempelhof (THF)). The flights are scheduled on a weekly basis (Sunday: OM135 goes to Berlin, OM136 returns to Ulaanbaatar). There is a stop-over in Shcheremetyevo/Moscow and a fuel refill in Nowosibirsk. Prices for the return ticket start from appr. USD 1200 when bought in Berlin.

Only the prices on the Ulaanbaatar / Beijing route are fairly constant: around USD 200.-- for a one-way ticket. For almost all other destinations there are wildly varying ticket prices depending on where the ticket is bought and whether the client is entitled to special reductions (like being an official student at the Mongolian National University).

2.2.3.2 What kind of accommodation is available in Mongolia?

In Ulaanbaatar there are some big hotels. One of them is a monument to Soviet-style luxury and lavishness: The "Ulaanbaatar Zoqid Buudal". Located next to the central square, it is ideal for travellers with a not so restricted budget. Price tags start at USD 60.- (or so) and the two dining rooms are frequently used by external guests when every other supply of food in Ulaanbaatar collapses. The next important hotel (near the Bogd Gegen Palace) is the Bayangol which was thoroughly revamped in 1992. Similar standard. The "Chinggis Khan Hotel" in Sansar (a district name in Ulaanbaatar) has been "due to open soon" since 1991 but did not do so until 1995. It used to be "under construction" and was temporarily managed by the Holiday Inn group, a Korean group (Lotte, I think) until it was finally taken over by a Mongolian enterprise. It offers good Western food and is virtually empty so that you can enjoy a very calm meal there. Service is good, part of the personnel was trained in Munich, Germany.

Small hotels for the traveller with a tight budget include the "Stroitel" (Russian: construction worker) which is north of the Ix Toirog (Great Ring) Road close to the smaller monastery. A Mongolian-Chinese joint venture is the "Manduhai" hotel near the Ix Dälgüür (Department Store). Clean rooms, simple furniture, but nice atmosphere and acceptable price tag. Other private hotels keep opening with the rise of the private sector. These offer similar prices (sometimes starting with USD 10.-- / day for a complete little flat) but the situations keeps changing so it is difficult to give names and addresses here. New hotels open constantly; a nice choice is the "Flower Hotel" which is the former "Altai Zoqid Buudal". It is under Japanese ma

2.2.4 Inner Mongolia - Tourism

2.2.4.1 How to travel to Inner Mongolia?

Inner Mongolia can be reached by train and by aircraft. The Transmongolian Railway which leads from Beijing via Ulaanbaatar to Ulan Ude crosses the Mongolian-Chinese border at Erenhot (Erlia[n]haote) / China and Zamyn Üüd / Mongolia. North of Datong it connects to the Chinese Railway, Inner Mongolian branch leading to Baotou and eventually to Ningxia and Gansu which implies that one can also travel to Inner Mongolia when coming from Lanzhou and Yinchuan. It takes about 10 hours to travel from Beijing to Huhhot and the night train which leaves Beijing in the evening is very convenient as one arrives at Huhhot early in the next morning. Trains go on a regular basis (usually every day, sometimes every second day depending on the line) and are fairly reliable. Prices are reliable, too, but the foreign traveller is forced to pay about twice as much as the Chinese citizen. Due to frequent depreciation of the Chinese Yuan no fixed number can be given here but a one-way trip (second class sleeper) from Beijing to Huhhot should be around USD 40.--.

Flights between Huhhot and Beijing go several times a week and last less than one hour. The ticket prices are not very much higher than those of the railway (considering prices for foreigners). Other destinations in Inner Mongolia are also served from Beijing. Up-to-date information on schedules should be available at travel agencies dealing China Airlines tickets.

2.2.4.2 What kind of accommodation is available in Inner Mongolia?

The traveller's situation is governed by more rules here than in Mongolia. Basically, when staying in the cities (like Huhhot etc.) the traveller has no choice but to stay in huge hotels. In the countryside the situation is similar to that in Mongolia but is more difficult to get to the countryside.

2.2.4.3 What kind of transport is available in Inner Mongolia?

In addition to railway (from and to Beijing, Huhhot, Baotou, Hailar etc.) there are flights between regional centres and long-distance busses within the regions. For local excursions you can also rent cars with drivers.

2.2.4.4 Which season is recommended for travelling?

See the answer about Mongolia above. Generally speaking, travelling is difficult in winter. The grasslands show their beauty only in summer, and in winter there is "nothing to see" in the conventional sense. On the other hand, since there is "nothing to see" in winter, winter is a good time to go there if you want to see temples, monasteries etc., because at that time you most certainly do not have to compete with other tourists for resources like accommodation, transport e.a. In addition, the places you're interested in will most probably be fairly empty.

2.2.4.5 What are the points of sightseeing, museums etc.?

Inner Mongolia deserves a better coverage in literature and in this FAQ than it finds at present. A few points of interest may be mentioned here (indicating that this is a *very* preliminary list).

The Inner Mongolia Museum in Huhhot has an enormous collection of archaeological findings from the times of the Xiong Nu on. The gold crowns on display there are virtually identical in design with the ones unearthed in Japan and dated to Japan's Kofun period. These findings contain some of the strongest hints that early Japan (before the nation state emerged) may have been part of a unified culture stretching from Central Asia over Korea to Japan.

Not so many temples and monasteries survived in Huhhot. One of the most interesting ones is the "Five Pagoda Temple" (tabun suburGan sumu - wu ta si) the walls of which are covered with thousands of Buddha sculptures. Its most fascinating object is a stellar map cut in stone (more than two meters in diameter) which is the eldest map with Mongolian zodiacal names in the world. The stone carving is protected by thick layers of glass which make it practically impossible to take pictures but the site is well worth the visit.

Of the two main temples ("Big" and "Small" temple: yeke zuu, baG-a zuu; da zhao, xiao zhao) only the big one remains as the small one was replaced by a school during the 1960s. The quarter of town where these temples are located is picturesque and offers an insight into Chinese life (Huhhot by overwhelming majority is a city with Han-Chinese population) as it might have been 'before Revolution', i.e. before 1949. The streets and lanes are so narrow that no automobile can pass, and rare enough for a Chinese city, much of the old architecture is preserved. Huhhot also has a mosque for its Hui nationality.

3 Transportation

3.1 Yahoo: Getting There & Away

3.1.1.1 Getting There & Away

Most people fly into Ulaan Baatar from Beijing, Berlin or Moscow. Organised tours also operate flights from Osaka and Seoul. The international Mongolian carrier is MIAT, which some wags claim stands for 'Maybe I'll Arrive Today'. Delayed and cancelled flights are common partly due to frequent poor weather conditions. The airport departure tax is around US\$10. The only other way foreigners can enter and leave Mongolia is on the Trans-Mongolian Railway linking Beijing and Moscow. Border crossings are at Ereen-Zamyn-Üüd on the Chinese-Mongolian border, and Naushki-Sükhbaatar on the Russian-Mongolian border. Some travellers have reported crossing into Mongolia from Russia and China by jeep or bus, but technically this is still illegal.

3.1.1.2 Getting Around

A vast, sparsely populated country with little infrastructure, Mongolia relies heavily on air transport. There are over 80 airports, few of which have paved runways. MIAT, the major internal airline, has flights to most of the provincial capitals, major cities and tourist destinations - but not all of them. Schedules change regularly, foreigners pay several times more than Mongolians for tickets and there's no computerised reservation system, so you can't buy a return ticket at the same place you purchase an outgoing one.

Buses are an increasingly popular way of travelling around the country, but services are still limited, the buses old and the journeys uncomfortable and slow. Also, bus drivers are occasionally drunk and breakdowns can be expected on all long distance trips. Bus routes start and end in Ulaan Bataar and no buses travel around western Mongolia. Slightly more expensive minibuses that travel between popular spots are quicker and more comfortable. Mongolia's 1750km (1090mi) railway is made up of a north-south line, which is part of the Trans-Mongolian Railway, connecting China with Russia.

Taxis are only useful along paved roads - ie, not that useful since only 1200km (744mi) of road out of a total of 47,000km (29,150mi) are paved. Jeeps are an important form of transport on the unpaved majority, and mandatory when visiting remote attractions. Jeeps tend to be slow and mechanically fragile. Usually they come with a driver and/or guide and, if it's a public jeep, with other passengers. Travelling around in your own jeep is not a good idea, though you can drive with an international driving license. Be aware that petrol can be hard to find; accidents, unfortunately, are not.

3.2 *Railway Information for Mongolia*

Reservations for international trains can be made at the International Railway Ticketing Office on the left hand side of the station.

PO Box 376, Ulaanbaatar 35
Tel. (976) 944365
Tel. (Information Desk) (976) 94133
Fax. (976) 955124 / 1 322994
Email. ubirtc@usa.net

Domestic tickets can also be bought from the station.
PO Box 376, Ulaanbaatar 35
Tel. (976) 944360
Tel. (Information Desk) (976) 94137
Fax. (976) 944350
Email. ubtz-bokzal@magicnet.mn

3.3 *Transport in Mongolia*

Visitors to Mongolia, wanting to get out into the countryside, will need one of two things . time or a reasonable amount of money. Mongolia has a diverse range of landscapes and cultures to explore but an under-developed transport infrastructure makes travel to the major tourism locations, difficult.

Because of Mongolia's large territory, travel times can be very long and prices very high compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Planes, trains, buses and jeeps or minibuses are the major forms of transport within Mongolia.

3.3.1.1 **Air**

MIAT (Mongolian International Air Transport) flies year round to 17 of Mongolia's 21 aimags. [CLICK HERE for details of their domestic timetable.](#) Most of the planes used are old Russian Antonov 24's. Few of the countryside airports have paved runways. Internal flights can be as much as 4 hours. There is a two-tier system of charges (one for Mongolians and one for foreigners). Prices range between US\$ and US\$ depending on destination. Foreigners will always need to pay for their flights in US\$ and tickets can be purchased from MIAT's head office in the centre of Ulaanbaatar. The baggage allowance for internal flights is Kg. Because of the lack of a fully computerised booking facility, the return part of any flight cannot be reserved in advance, although payments can be made. The return part of any flight needs to be reserved upon reaching the destination from which you will fly back. All flights are served directly from Ulaanbaatar, although some routes will include a stop-off, for example, flights to Khovd will stop at Moron, an ideal place to get a jeep to Khovsgol. Check in times for all internal flights are two hours. Passengers are advised to note that internal flights do not have toilet facilities and that seat belts do not always work.

3.3.1.2 **Train**

Apart from the Trans-Mongolian trains between Moscow and Beijing, there are also local trains that ply the same length of track. In addition, there are also tracks to Baganuur, the industrial town east of Ulaanbaatar and Erdenet, a copper town in the north of the country. Domestic rail travel is not very popular with tourists as there are few places of interest on route, although from Erdenet, it may be possible to get a jeep to Lake Khovsgol. Restaurant cars are only available on some routes. On internal routes, there are two classes available . soft seat and hard seat. The advanced purchase of tickets (up to ten days beforehand) is advised to guarantee seats and avoid a scramble and long queues. Prices for all destinations are under US\$15 and are payable in tugrugs. Tickets can be purchased from the ticket office outside the station. On overnight journeys, clean sheets can be hired for a few hundred tugrugs.

3.3.1.3 **Bus**

The bus is the cheapest, most uncomfortable and often most unreliable form of transport. The buses are old and in most cases poorly maintained. They will on average, allowing for stops, travel at around 30km per hour. All routes start in Ulaanbaatar at the long-distance bus stand. Almost all aimags are served and prices to even the furthest destinations are usually less than US\$10 (payable in Tugrugs). Tickets should be purchased in advance. Buses will usually have the destination written in Cyrillic.

3.3.1.4 **Shared Jeeps and Minibuses**

Russian jeeps and minibuses travel regularly between Ulaanbaatar, aimag centres and some tourist destinations. The times and frequency of departures depend upon demand. This form of transport is normally quicker and more comfortable than the buses, although drivers will try to squeeze as many people into their vehicles as possible. Prices are higher than for the buses . approximately MNT25/Km. Public shared jeeps and minibuses also leave from the long-distance bus stand. Finding out where vehicles are going could be difficult, as many jeeps will not have the destination names visible.

3.3.1.5 **Renting Transport**

One of the most satisfying and comfortable ways to travel is to hire a jeep and driver yourself. Again, the long-distance bus stand is a good place to start looking. Most drivers will be happy to reduce the number of passengers, as they will make up the difference in cost by charging around MNT300/km (the same as for taxis in Ulaanbaatar). This price should include the driver's expenses, although visitors are advised to agree the terms and costs in advance. This includes checking the odometer reading

before setting off. If you have the time and the money, this is definitely the best way to see and experience the countryside. Jeeps and minibuses can often be arranged in aimag or tourism centres, particularly when planes arrive during the tourist season.

It is possible to rent or buy bicycles, horses and camels although these are not considered viable for long journeys.

4 Attractions and events

4.1 Excite Travel: Destinations: Mongolia: What to Do

4.1.1 Activities

4.1.1.1 ARKHANGAI (Arkangai)

This region in the center of the country is Mongolia, s version of Switzerland, with beautiful mountains, meadows, rivers, lakes and forests. It includes the Khangai Mountains, the second highest range in the country, as well as the Chuluut River, with a scenic gorge and the Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur, or White Lake. A marvelous area for trekking on foot or horseback. There is also excellent fishing in the area. Tsetserleg, the capital of the province, is located in a beautiful mountain setting.

4.1.1.2 DARKHAN (Darchan, Darhan)

If your itinerary takes you to Darkhan, there s no reason to dawdle. this mining town of 86,000 is relatively new, modern and industrial, and really holds little of interest for most visitors. Should you get stuck there for a full day, there are two monasteries that can be visited: the small Haragiin Hiid and the much more interesting Amarbayasgalant Hiid. The latter is reached via a three-hour journey on dirt roads. the monastery is quite nice, but for Buddhist monastery enthusiasts only. The wild forests and the rivers along the way provide some reward for this grueling trip. *115 mi/190 km northwest of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.3 GOBI DESERT (Shamo Desert)

Covering the southeastern third of Mongolia, the Gobi Desert stretches about 3,000 mi/4,830 km along both sides of the Chinese border. It isn. t a Saharan-type desert, although there are sand dunes, the Gobi is not a barren wasteland. It has herds of Bactrian camels (with two humps), horses and donkeys, as well as leopards, mountain sheep and ibexes. There is a lot of variety within the Gobi, from wildlife parks and mountains to canyons with dramatic rockfaces. Once the site of an ancient inland sea, the area has dried up and then eroded over the eons, providing paleontologists with magnificent specimens of dinosaur fossils. With so much to see, we recommend traveling through the Gobi rather than just staying in one place. The best ways to experience it are by camel or by jeep, or by a combination of both. Local as well as international tour companies offer interesting itineraries with fairly basic accommodations.

We recommend Dalanzadgad, at the center of the South Gobi, as a good jumping-off or end point. it has a serviceable airport (it s about an hour and half from Ulaanbaatar by air). Check ahead of time, however, to make sure that fuel is available in the town if you. re going to be driving. A popular place to stay near town is the South Gobi Tourist Camp. the area is noted for mountain sheep, camels, wild donkeys and gazelle.

Among the must-see sights in the Gobi are the protected **Great Gobi National Park** and the **Gobi-Gurvan Saikhan National Park**. The desert. s mountainous terrain is stunning: The scenery in the 10,000-ft/3,050-m Gurvansaikhan Mountains and in the Yol Valley (yol means eagle in Mongolian) are breathtaking. Also in the desert is the Khermen Tsav (a canyon filled with dinosaur fossils).

4.1.1.4 KARAKORUM (Har Horin, Qaraqorum)

Originally a Mongol encampment, this City of Black Sand was Genghis Khan. s capital. Kublai Khan abandoned the city and moved his capital to Peking, after which Karakorum fell into ruin. Though not much of the ancient city remains today, people still go to visit the impressive 16th-century Lamaist monastery Erdeni Dzu, poke around the area tombs and ancient ruins, enjoy the mountain scenery, see a horse farm and stay overnight in a ger camp. The monastery is a fairly popular tourist stop. one section has been turned into a museum. *200 mi/320 km southwest of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.5 KHENTII (Hentii)

This region in the northeastern corner of the country encompasses the **Khentii National Park** and the Khentii Mountains. It. s good for horseback riding trips and for anyone interested in Ghengis Khan (he was born somewhere in the area) or Buryat culture. The park. s attractions include wildlife (deer, antelope and, sometimes, bear) and the mountain that Ghengis Khan worshipped, Burkhan Haldan.

4.1.1.6 KHOVD

This tree-lined town in western Mongolia along the Buyant Gol River is an excellent jumping-off point for a number of excursions. From there you can get to spectacular Tavanbogd, Mongolia. s highest peak (on the borders with Russia and China); the Blue Goat Nature Reserve; the Blue Caves; and **Har Us Nuur (Black Water Lake)**, a breeding ground for rare birds and other wildlife. Khovd itself has a good museum and a lively market on Sundays. The cultures in the area are

fascinating as well: The Kazakh people hunt with eagles, and the Tuvan people are known for their throat singing. *1,250 mi/2000 km west of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.7 KHUJHIRT (Hujirt, Kujirt)

This former mountain resort is now rather decrepit and is of note only because you drive through it on the way to the impressive Orkhon Waterfall. There is a ger camp in town, although most travelers prefer the facilities in nearby Karakorum. *190 mi/305 km west of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.8 LAKE KHOVSGOL (Hovskul)

This high mountain lake (5400 ft/1,645 m above sea level) is surrounded by mountains, meadows and forest. a complete contrast to the rest of Mongolia. You can hike along the shore, take a dip in the icy waters or try your hand at fishing. The Darkhat Valley to the west of the lake is a beautiful area with lakes, fishing, rivers and possibilities for bird watching and horse trekking. It is possible to visit the Reindeer people who live in the area, but this should be done only with an experienced guide. *125 mi/200 km northwest of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.9 MANZSHIR HIID

This beautiful monastery is located in a spectacular setting. The monastery, which was built in the 1800s, was badly damaged in the Stalinist antireligious fervor of the 1930s. Today the damage is being repaired and the monks are very friendly to foreign visitors. The monastery is usually seen on a day trip from Ulaanbaatar, but the area is rewarding for walkers, who can attempt to trek up one of the four Holy Peaks (the easiest is Tsetseeguun): You'll need a guide, and pack a picnic (the nearest food is at the lackluster town of Zuunmod, 5 mi/8 km away). There is a ger camp near the monastery. About 5 mi/8 km away, a Japanese corporation has partially financed a tourist camp called Ondor-Dov. The camp consists of a number of gers laid out in rows overlooked by a central restaurant/reception building, which looks somewhat like an airport control tower. The original idea was to attract Japanese golfers to a huge golf course nearby, but this has yet to happen. This seldom-used camp is a happy find for any visitor who happens to be in the area and is looking for a little comfort. (Good food, too.) *30 mi/50 km south from Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.10 MORON

Besides obvious jokes about its name, Moron is memorable because it is the nearest base to Khovsgol Nuur, the country's most beautiful park, home of Lake Khovsgol. *125 mi/200 km northwest from Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.11 NAUSHKI

Naushki is the primary point of entry from Russia, via train. That is all the town has going for it. we don't suggest staying any longer than necessary to clear customs. *175 mi/280 km north of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.12 SAYNSHAND

This dry, dusty town located on the Trans-Mongolian rail line provides an inexpensive way for hardy, independent types to see the Gobi Desert. Hire a jeep and guide to take you on a route which passes interesting rock formations, **Baga Bogd** (a dry mountainous region) and the **Burdene Bulag** (the country's largest sand dunes). Day trips on desert camels can also be organized in town. However, most tour groups prefer Dalanzadgad, instead, as an entry point into the Gobi. *260 mi/420 km southeast of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.13 TERELJ

One of the Communist party's former summer camps, Terelj is now full of tourist camps. It's located inside the **Gorkhi Terelj National Park**, which is in the Baga Khentii Mountains. The area has gentle mountains and scenic green valleys set at an average altitude of 5,200 ft/1,600 m. The wildflowers in summer are stunning. There are lots of possibilities for hiking, horseback riding and bird watching. The adventurous can ride on horseback to Black Lake, a beautiful and challenging ride. Also nearby is Tortoise Rock, a reptile-shaped rock formation created by an ancient glacier. you can climb right inside. *55 mi/85 km northeast of Ulaanbaatar.*

4.1.1.14 ULAANBAATAR (Ulan Bator, Kulun, Urga, Niisel Huree)

Locally known as UB, Ulaanbaatar (pop. 575,000) was, for centuries, a mobile tent city that followed the Royal Court around the country. Today, its oldest buildings date from the 17th century, when the city finally settled in its present location by the Tuul River. The city is a bit of a contrast. faceless Soviet high-rise apartment blocks ringed by suburbs of Mongolian gers. Even though it's rather large, it's relatively quiet, although traffic has been increasing in recent years. Visitors should first see the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, the country's largest. it was the only one to survive the purges against what the Communists called the former backwardness of Mongolia. From Gandantegchinlen, head for the Choijin Monastery, now a museum of Buddhist artifacts, including priceless religious artworks by the 17th-century Buddhist teacher and artist, Zanabasar. Don't miss the Bodg Khan Museum located in the country's former palace (royal and ceremonial costumes, jewelry, sedan chairs and other artworks) or the statues in the smaller museum next door. The Natural History

Museum has an interesting collection of dinosaur bones, discovered in the Gobi Desert, but you may want to skip the Art Gallery's bland collection of Socialist Realist paintings.

Considering its size, the capital supports an amazing range of culture. There are five major theaters, including an opera house that presents Western operas sung in Mongolian! The National Theater offers folklore performances, which are extremely popular with the locals. Other nightlife has gotten considerably more lively, too, with new bars and nightclubs and, in summer, lots of outdoor cafes and pubs (places of choice for watching the 10:30 pm sunsets). Plan to spend at least two nights in Ulaanbaatar. Because of the scarcity of accommodations outside the city, Ulaanbaatar also makes a good base for touring the region.

4.2 Attractions

4.2.1 Ulaan Baatar

Often called UB by foreigners, Mongolia's sleepy capital has the look and feel of a neglected 1950s European city. The old Soviet cars and buses are slowly being replaced by newer Japanese versions, but cows still wander the roads, goats sift through the rubbish, and traditionally dressed men and women mingle on the city's streets with Mongolia's *nouveaux riche*.

Built along the Tuul river and surrounded by lovely mountains, Ulaan Baatar is dominated by communist style highrise apartment buildings, but about 250,000 locals also live in the extended ger suburbs on the outskirts of town. The felt gers are protected from the winds, which are especially fierce in spring, by wooden fences. The topography makes for good hillside views overlooking the city, but during winter the view is obscured by pollution and temperatures are painfully freezing. The centre of the city is **Sükhbaatar Square**. From this spot in July 1921 Damdiny Sükhbaatar, the 'hero of the revolution', declared Mongolia's independence from the Chinese. The square was also where the first protests were held in 1989 which eventually led to the fall of communism. On normal days, it's a serene place where only pigeons and peddling photographers do much of anything. The grey **State Parliament House** faces the square, as does the tall, modern **Palace of Culture**, a useful landmark containing the impressive **Mongolian Art Gallery** and other odes to Mongolian culture.

One block north-west of the square, the **Museum of Natural History** is worth a visit if you're heading into the countryside. There are exhibits about Mongolia's geography, flora and fauna and some displays about recent Mongolian history. More impressive are the 2 complete dinosaur skeletons which were found in the Gobi - the giant flesh eating *Tarbosaurus* and its first cousin, the little duckbilled plant-eating *Saurolophus*. The **Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts** has an excellent collection of paintings, carvings and sculptures, including many by the revered sculptor, artist and Buddhist, Zanabazar. It also contains other rare religious exhibits, such as *thangkas* (cloth paintings) and Buddhist statues.

Around the start of the 19th century, over 100 Tibetan Buddhist *süm* (temples) and *khiid* (monasteries) served a population of about 50,000 in Ulaan Baatar. Most of the temples and monasteries, along with their belongings, were destroyed during the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. **Gandantegchinlen Khiid** survived because the communists kept it as a showcase to impress foreigners. Roughly meaning 'the great place of complete joy', Gandan is one of Ulaan Baatar's most amazing sights. Within it are several glorious temples adorned with gold and jewels. The 150 or so monks who live here do their bit to bring the temples back to life with plenty of chanting and ceremonialising.

The **Winter Palace of Bogd Khaan** was also spared. Built between 1893 and 1903, it's where Mongolia's 8th Bogd Khaan (Living Buddha) and last king, lived for 20 years. Depending on which version of history you read, the Bogd Khaan either enjoyed irreverent pleasures of the flesh and bottle and was blind with syphilis, or he was a great visionary and nationalist. When he died in 1924, the Soviet-led communist government of Mongolia prohibited any future reincarnations, so there were no further Mongolian Buddhist leaders. The 6 temples on the grounds of the Winter Palace contain collections of gifts given the Bogd Khaan, including an extraordinary array of stuffed animals.

4.2.2 Four Holy Peaks

The 4 peaks surrounding Ulaan Bataar are considered holy. The Tsetseegum, Chingeltei, Songino Khairkhan and Bayansurkh mountains correspond, more or less, to the 4 points on the compass. These peaks are tremendous for hiking, and they're popular for their forests of larch trees, grasslands and stunning bird and animal life, including ibex and sable. **Tsetseegum Uul** is easily the most magnificent. At 2260m (7400ft), it's the highest point in the Bogdkhan Uul range, which dominates the skyline to the south of Ulaan Baatar. The trip is only sensible from the beginning of June to the end of September and a permit is required, which you can get at the entrance gate to the **Bogdkhan National Park**, about 15km (9mi) south of Ulaan Baatar. The **Manzshir Khiid Route** to Tsetseegum from the mountain's southern side is the easiest. Along it there are broad meadows, fields of rocky boulders and *ovoos* (pile of stones left as offerings to the gods). The **Zaisan Route** is the most scenic but also the most difficult, taking about 6 hours each way along precariously steep boulders. Anyway you go, along with the permit, you'll need a compass, plenty of water, food and cold weather gear, as sudden thunderstorms and icy winds can come out of nowhere even in summer.

4.2.3 Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve

The Khustain Nuruu Nature Reserve was established in 1993 to preserve Mongolia's wild *takhi* horses and the steppe environment in which they live. The takhi is probably the most recognised and successful symbol of Mongolia's diverse and unique wildlife. Also known as Przewalski's horse (named after the Pole who first took an interest in them), the takhi used to roam the countryside in great herds. In the 1960s they almost became extinct because poachers killed them for meat, and because development and livestock overgrazing reduced their fodder. In the early 1990s, with assistance from international

environmental groups, many takhi were reintroduced into specially protected areas in the 90,000ha (222,300acre) Khustain Nuruu and in the south Gobi. About 200 now live in this park or in the wild.

The nature reserve is about 100km (62mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar. It's easiest to start your trip to Khustain from Zuunmod, 40km (25mi) south of Ulaan Baatar. There are daily buses, minibuses and shared taxis to Zuunmod from Ulaan Baatar. You'll need a jeep to reach the reserve from Zuunmod.

4.2.4 Kharkhorin (Karakorum)

In 1220 Genghis Khan decided to build the capital city of his vast Mongolian empire at Karakorum. Building was completed by his son, Ogedai Khan, after Genghis' death, but Karakorum served as the capital for only 40 years before Kublai Khan moved it to what is now Beijing. Following the move, and the subsequent collapse of the Mongolian empire, Karakorum was abandoned and then later destroyed by hordes of Manchurian soldiers. Whatever was left was used to help build the **Erdene Zuu** monastery in the 16th century, which itself was badly destroyed during the Stalinist purges. The modern and dreary town of Kharkhorin was built on the same spot.

Erdene Zuu (Hundred Treasures) was the first centre of Lamaism in Mongolia. The monastery was started in 1586 but not entirely finished until 300 years later. It has between 60 and 100 temples, about 300 gers set up inside the walls and, at its height, up to 1000 monks in residence. Like Karakorum, the monastery was abandoned and then vandalised by invading Manchurians. All but 3 of the temples in Erdene Zuu were destroyed by Stalin's thugs and an unknown number of monks killed. The monastery remained closed until 1965 when it was permitted to reopen as a museum, but not as a place of worship. Only with the collapse of communism did the monastery become active again.

Today it retains much of its former glory. Enclosed in an immense walled compound, the 3 temples within are dedicated to the 3 stages of a Buddha's life: as a child, adolescent and adult. The main, central temple is called the **Zuu of Buddha** and has statues of Buddha as a child. Outside the monastery walls are 2 '**turtle rocks**'. Four of these once marked the boundaries of ancient Karakorum. More, ahem, stimulating is the **phallic rock** hidden in a small valley among the hills overlooking the monastery, about 30 minutes away on foot. According to local tradition, all women who visit the rock must have sex within 24 hours.

Kharkhorin is 370km (230mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar. Between July and September there are flights between the cities several times a week. Year-round, buses make the 7-8 hour trip just as often.

4.2.5 Khövsgöl Nuur

Try to imagine a 2760 sq km (1080 sq mi) alpine lake, with water so pure you can drink it. Then add dozens of 2000m (6560ft) mountains, thick pine forests and lush meadows with grazing yaks and horses, and you have a vague impression of Khövsgöl Nuur, Mongolia's top scenic heartstopper. This is the deepest lake in Central Asia, and the world's 14th largest source of fresh water. Situated along the border with Russia, the lake is sacred to local Mongolians, who refer to it as 'mother'. It's full of fish and the area is home to sheep, ibex, bear and moose, as well as over 200 species of birds. There are numerous caves around the lake, though they're hard to find without a guide. Three separate peoples live in the area: Darkhad Mongols, Buryats and Tsaatan.

An amazing 90 rivers flow into the lake, but only a single river flows out - the Egiin Gol, which ultimately reaches Lake Baikal in Siberia. Khövsgöl Nuur freezes in winter, allowing huge trucks carrying fuel to cross from Siberia. Visitors can kayak on the lake when it unfreezes, and hike or ride on horseback (or yakback) around it.

The southern boundary of Khövsgöl Nuur is about 775km (480mi) north-west of Ulaan Baatar and is reachable by occasional plane, bus or your own jeep. The best time to visit is in spring (around April and May), though. It's still very cold at this time and the lake may be frozen. The summer (July and August) is warmer but more crowded. Permits are required to visit the lake. They're available on the main road into Khövsgöl Nuur National Park, a few km before the southern entrance at the town of Khatgal.

4.3 *The Best Current Tour Sites*

Lands of rivers full of fish, several volcanoes, lakes, flowers and forests. Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur National Park: Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur is a freshwater lake with volcanic area around it, is certainly the highlight of Arkhangai, and one of the best lake of Mongolia with many species of fish. Khorgo Uul volcano (2968 m) is the north-eastern side of the lake. Chuluut and Ikh Jargalantiin rivers of Arkhangai Aimag with many species of fish.

Khovsgol lake: In the far north of Mongolia, covering an area of 2000 square kms, is this breathtaking, beautiful lake, with abundant fish. Among the fish inhabiting this lake is the Mongolian fresh water salmon or taimen. Rivers of Khovsgol Aimag with many species of fish.

KaraKorum: About 400 kms south-west of Ulaanbaatar, Kharhorin (formely known as KaraKorum) was the capital of the Mongolian empire in the 13th century, before Kublai Khan moved it to Beijing.

Erdene Zuu monastery: Near KaraKorum is this monastery, built in 1586 with stones from the ruins of KaraKorum. Erdene Zuu was the first buddhist center in Mongolia.

Orkhon waterfall: Formed by volcanic and earthquake activities 20-30, 000 years ago.

Mountains of Khairt Khan and Khustain Nuruu uul: Przewaslki's wild horse was re-introduction in Hustain Nuruu Natural reserve.

Ulaan Tsav: Reminiscent of the high plateau in Arizona. This area is also an extraordinary wilderness area. Large monuments of stones push upward from the barren wilderness toward the heaven.

Canyon of Yolym Am: Strictly Protected Area. Traveling through the Gobi desert where temperatures often reach 35 degrees, one would never expect to see a stream under ice. This is another wonderful example of Mongolia's natural marvels.

Khongor Dunes: Has an extraordinary length of 180 kms and 15-20 metres wide lies on the northern part of the mountain of Servree and Zuulen.

Bayanzag: Archeological finds of the paleolithic era were found here as well as a complete dinosaur skeletons, eggs, and hatchlings, of the cretaceous period.

Togrogiin Shiree: Here were found a dinosaur fossils, eggs, and hatchlings, of the cretaceous period.

Shargaljuut: The major attraction in Bayankhongor aimag with 330 hot or cold water springs, is about 620 Km of Ulaanbaatar and 200 Km of KaraKorum (Kharhorim).

Orog Nuur: The beautiful saltwater lake with sand dunes around it, is about 150 km of Bayankhongor city.

Ikh Bogd Uul (mountain, 3558 m) is not far of Orog Nuur.

Bougyn Tsav-is located in the Gobi area, about 220 Km of Orog lake. Skeletons and fossils of giant dinosaurs of Cretaceous age have been found here.

Steppes of the Far East: A land of remote grassy steppes. Choilbalsan, situated on the banks of Kherlen river, 665 kms east of Ulaanbaatar.

The Eastern Steppes of Mongolia are of great ecological importance because, unlike most other grasslands in Central Asia and the rest of the world, they have been relatively little modified by human use. Neighbouring Russia and China have grasslands, but they are of lesser extent and have been greatly modified by agricultural and industrial development. Traditional herding practices are still used in Mongolia, and livestock densities are still relatively low, particularly in the easternmost province of Dornod. Apart from its unique grasslands, Eastern Mongolia is also home to vast herds of migratory Mongolian gazelles that were once widespread in Mongolia and neighbouring areas of Russia and China but are now limited largely to the Eastern Steppes of Mongolia because of habitat destruction and hunting in China and Russia, and disruption of migration routes. There are estimated to be over two million gazelles, but migrating species always pose a formidable conservation challenge as they cannot be confined to protected areas and they readily cross international borders. The Mongolian gazelle has suffered a massive reduction in range and population size over the last few decades, and its continued survival is threatened if present trends continue. For more information, please see our Ecovolunteer Program.

Lake of Buir Nuur: The largest lake in east Mongolia, is home of many species of rare birds, and the Mongolian Gazelle (*Procarpa Gutturosa*).

Winter Palace of Bogd Khan, the last emperor of Mongolia. Here, he lived until 1924. The Winter Palace was built in 1903. Fine Arts museum. Gandan buddhist monastery.

The natural history museum with its World-famous collection of dinosaurs and quite astonishing dinosaurs eggs-still in their nests.

Terej National Park: is a picturesque place of high cliffs eroded in granites of Mesozoic age.

4.4 Tourist Attractions & Destinations

4.4.1 Kharakhorum

Mongolia's ancient capital, Kharakhorum, Chinggis Khaan's fabled city, was founded in 1220 in the Orkhon valley, at the crossroads of the Silk Road. It was from there that the Mongol Empire governed, until Khubilai Khaan moved it to Beijing. The symbolic ruins of Kharakhorum (kharkhorin), monumental walls (400 m of length) with 108 stupas, surround the first Buddhist monastery in Mongolia Erdene Zuu Monastery, built in 1586. In 1792, it housed 62 temples and 10,000 lamas; since 1990, it has become an active monastery again. Turtles carved from the stone marked the boundaries of the complex. Nearby, Turkish monuments and rock inscriptions erected in 8-9th centuries in memory of outstanding fighters for independence.

4.4.2 Gobi Desert

The Gobi Desert is a vast zone of desert and desert steppe covering almost 30 percent of the Mongolian territory. The area is often imagined as a lifeless desert like in many other parts of the world. In reality, most part of the Gobi Desert is a land of steppes and it is the home for camel breeders rich with wildlife and vegetation. Mongolians consider that there are 33 different Gobi, where sandy desert occupies only 3 percent of the total territory. Climate is extreme with 40 degrees Celsius in summer and severe winters.

4.4.3 Lake Khovsgol

Known as 'The Dark Blue Pearl', Lake Khovsgol is Mongolia's largest and deepest lake. Located in the northernmost province, it is the largest tributary stream of Lake Baikal in Russia. Khovsgol is 1645 m above sea level and is frozen from January until April or May.

A ferryboat operates between Khatgal and Khankh, two towns on the southern and northern shores of the lake that are within the boundaries of the Khovsgol National Park.

4.4.4 Amarbayasgalant Monastery

The Amarbayasgalant Monastery is located 360 km north of Ulaanbaatar is one of the favourite destinations for visitors. It can be reached by jeep or by a combination of local train and motor vehicle ride. Built in 1727-1736, the Monastery was the second most important in Mongolia after Erdene Zuu Monastery in Kharakhorum.

4.4.5 Terelj Resort

Open year-round, Terelj Resort is set in a spectacular valley only a two-hour drive from Ulaanbaatar.

Visitors can take leisurely strolls on green meadows carpeted with edelweiss and a dazzling variety of other wild flowers, view fascinating rock formations against a backdrop of pine covered mountains and wander along the wooded banks of a mountain stream. Overnight guests can stay in gers or guest rooms.

4.4.6 Khan Khentii

The native land of Chinggis Khaan, Khan Khentii is covered with forests, taiga, and mountain forest steppe.

It is the land described in *The Secret History Of Mongols*, a literary monument of the nation, and is a protected area located north-east of the capital city.

4.4.7 Khorgo

Khorgo Volcano is a dead volcano covered with basalt lying in the east of the Lake Terkhiin Tsagaan (National Park) in Arhangai aimag. Interesting bubbles of solidified lava named 'Basalt ger'. It is possible here to visit yak herders.

4.4.8 Manzshir Monastery

Manzshir Monastery is located in the luxuriant valley of the Bogd Khan Mountain in Tuv aimag, and one hour drive from Ulaanbaatar can bring visitors to Manzushir. It was established in 1733 with 20 temples and 300 monks.

Destroyed in 1932, the only remaining temple has been restored and a museum at the site tells the story of the monastery.

4.4.9 Bayan Ulgii

Called "the Roof of the World", Bayan-Ulgii is a far-off land of high mountains (the Mongol Altai. Tavan Bogd mountains with 4,373 m peak) torrents and glaciers, inhabited by Kazakh, a minority who has a different culture from the Mongols, herding yaks and goats and hunting with trained eagles.

The Khovd River flows through the province passing primitive wilding areas with mountain steppes vegetation.

4.5 Yahoo: Events and activities

4.5.1 Events

The biggest event of the year is the **Naadam Festival**, known as the *eriyin gурvan naadam*, after the 3 'manly sports' of wrestling, archery and horse racing. The festival is held all over the country, normally between 11 and 13 July, the anniversary of the 1921 Mongolian Revolution. The major events take place during the first 2 days. **Tsagaan Sar** (White Month) is the start of the lunar new year in January or February. After months of enduring a bitter winter, Mongolians celebrate over 3 days with a lot of food, liquor and singing.

4.5.2 Activities

The Four Holy Peaks surrounding Ulaan Bataar offer challenging **hiking** and breathtaking views. Manzshir Khiid Route on the Tsetseegum peak's southern side is the easiest route up; Zaisan Route is the most scenic and most difficult. There's more hiking in Gурvansaikhan National Park, around the hills of Khovd, and in the Gobi Desert. Huge Khövsgöl Nuur lake is a nirvana for **fishing** and **kayaking** and there's some **spelunking** to be done in lakeshore caves. January and February are good months for **skiing**. Downhill and crosscountry ski tours leave from Ulaan Bataar. Relive Genghis Khan's glory days by grabbing a **horse**, **camel** or **yak** for a **ride** in and around Ulaan Baatar.

4.6 *Yahoo: Off the beaten track*

4.6.1 Amarbayasgalant Khiid

After Erdene Zuu Khiid in Kharkhorin, Amarbayasgalant Khiid is considered the most important monastery in Mongolia. It's also one of the most beautiful. Situated in northern central Mongolia, Amarbayasgalant Khiid was originally built in 1737 by the Manchurian king Kansu, who dedicated it to the great Mongolian Buddhist and sculptor, Zanabazar. The communists found their way here in the 1930s and destroyed 10 of the 37 temples and statues. These days the temples are normally closed but you can ask the head monk to open them and you're welcome to watch the 30 resident monks conduct their daily ceremonies.

A daily bus and frequent express trains link Ulaan Baatar and Darkhan, which is 219km (136mi) north-west of the capital. The monastery is 140km (87mi) south-east of Darkhan; you'll need a jeep to reach the monastery from Darkhan.

4.6.2 Gurvansaikhan National Park

Unlike other national parks in the **Gobi Desert**, the Gurvansaikhan contains notable attractions, and the facilities - ger camps and roads - are reasonably good. The park contains mountains, dinosaur fossils, extraordinary sand dunes, rock formations and a valley that has ice for most of the year. The park is home to over 200 species of birds, including the Mongolian Desert Finch, Cinerous Vulture, Desert Warbler and Houbara Bustard. The sparse vegetation manages to support black-tailed gazelle, snow leopard, ibex, argali sheep and endangered species of wild camel. A small permit fee is collected at the gate to the **Yolyn Am** valley, where there's also a small museum of stuffed animals.

Many foreigners regard the Gobi as a remote, exotic and mystical place. While it is some of those things, it's mainly grass, shrubs and rocks: oases and sand cover only about 3% of the desert. It is, however, a land of extremes: decent rain falls only every 2 to 3 years, and it can be well over 40°C (105°F) during summer and below -40°C (-40°F) in winter; storms of dust and sand can be fearsome in spring.

Gurvansaikhan is 340km (211mi) south-west of Ulaan Baatar, near the town of Dalanzadgad and not far from the Chinese border. Most travelers to the Gobi fly into Dalanzadgad and then rent a jeep. There's also a weekly bus between Ulaan Baatar and Dalanzadgad.

4.6.3 Khovd

Once a small farming community, and later a centre for Russian and Mongolian trading, Khovd city is now a major industrial centre and a good place from which to start exploring western Mongolia. At the northern end of the city are the rapidly disappearing **Sangiin Kherem** ruins, built in about 1762 by the Manchu warlords who once conquered, and brutally governed, Mongolia. The walled compound was completely abandoned after the 1911 Chinese Revolution overthrew the last emperor. The dry, rugged hills north of the ruins offer some great views and good hiking.

Khovd is 1425km (884mi) west of Ulaan Baatar via a westward bus route that travels through Arvaikheer, Bayankhongor and Altai. There are regular flights from Ulaan Bataar to Khovd and, once there, you can rent jeeps for jaunts into the surrounding countryside.

4.7 *Erdene Zuu Monastery*

The first Buddhist monastery in Mongolia was built at the initiative of the most influential *Khalha* lord *Abtai Khan*, in 1586 on the spot where *Khara-Korum*, the famous capital of the Mongolian Empire of the 13th century was. The stone columns, blocks and sculptures excavated from the ruins of the city show that various building materials were used in the construction of this monastery, which began in the 16th century and continued until the 19th century. A considerable portion of the building work of the temples, fortress and stupa's was created under the direction of the Mongolian artisan *Manzhir* and many Mongolian craftsmen participated in erecting this architectural ensemble. The architectural style of the temples combines the style of ancient *Mongolian*, *Tibetan* and *Chinese* architecture. Most noteworthy is that not a single nail was used in the building.

The territory of the monastery occupies an area of 400 square meters and is surrounded by a stone wall with 108 stupa's. These stupa's were erected either in honour of a prominent historical event, or as the grave of a state or religious figure. Almost ten thousand lamas lived within the fortress, which contained more than 60 chapels of various sizes. Erdene Zuu is said to have had 108 Tsam dancers and religious rites were arranged annually in different parts of the monastery.

The *Mongolians*, *Chinese*, *Arab* and *Tibetan* scripts of the 13th and 14th centuries have been preserved to the present in some of the temples. The chapel built in honour of the *Tusket Khan Chahundorj's* visit to the *Dalai Lama* in 1675 is also situated here.

Furthermore there is a brick fortress wall with two graves, of *Abtai Khan* who died in 1587, and of his son *Tushet Khan Gombodorj*. The tomb of Gombodorj's wife is placed outside of the fortress in the so-called "female sector" of the monastery, on the north eastern side. Three Main temples, "three Zuu" the western temple of which was built by Abtai Khan and his son Gombodorj, stand in the most sacred western sector. Three statues of 8 idols are placed in the temple, the one on the right being *Jamba* (the Holy Maitreya), disseminator of Buddhism after Buddha, and the one in the center is *Buddha* in his old age.

The main Central Zuu was built by the missionary *Tsogt* at the *Zungen Lord's* ruling. An idol can be seen on either side of the entrance of the main shrine of Erdene Zuu, the idol *Lham* to the left and the idol *Gombogur* to the right.

Three big idol statues are placed along the northern wall. On the left is the God of medicine *Otoch Manal*, on the right is *Holy Abida*, and in the center the *Buddha* in his youth. Statues of 8 idols are also placed in the temple. These are the Buddha's disciples, the *God of the Moon*, 8 Sages and others. A special pedestal displays dozens of gilded statues of idols (chased and moulded) the works of *Under Gegen Zanabazar*, a master sculptor and artist. The walls of the temple are adorned with beautiful works of appliqué depicting the forest, mountains and caves where gods pursued their hermitic existence. These pictures are called the land of the *Thousand Buddha's of Golden Time*, who have descended from heaven to earth.

The eastern temple of Zuu was built by *Erhi Mergen Khan's* wife and the *Bogdo Lama's* mother. There are three big statues displayed in the temple, on the left is the *Bogdo Lama* himself, on the right is the idol *Janraiseg*, and in the center is the image of the *Buddha* in his teenage years. The model of the eastern Zuu temple made of brown sandalwood is placed on a central pedestal.

The main stupa which is called the *Golden Prayer Stupa* stands in the northern sector. The three-circled palace of *Lavran* restored in 1969-73 is located nearby and is the only monument in Mongolia of pure Tibetan style. The central square of the monastery, 45 meters in diameter, is paved with flagstones and is named the *Square of Happiness and Prosperity*. Legend says that the ger of *Abtai Khan* stood here, a big ger of Benediction erected in 1658, in which the annual assemblies of the Mongolian lords were usually held. A grass-covered hollow has been left at the place near the square where there was once a pond. The Erdene Zuu monastery preserves the marvelous works of the Mongolian artisans, painters, cutters, sculptors, embroiders and craftsmen of the 17th century.

Erdene Zuu monastery was severely damaged at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century at the time of the struggle of the Mongolians against the Manchu invaders. It was restored several times, in 1760-96 and in 1808-14.

4.8 The Shanch Lama Monastery

Founded in 1646 by *Samobaatar*, who arrived at the original site when he was 13 years old. The current location of the monastery is more to the east. During the anti-religion purges of 1936, the buildings and temples were destroyed. The ruin that currently stands towards the middle of the complex used to be two stories high until 1950, when some officials decided that it still looked too much like a temple and ordered its further demolition.

During 53 years the faith was secretly kept alive by five successive Lama's. The last one is now 77 years old and still performing the *Tsoktjin* ceremony, the reading and teaching of old Tibetan scripts. In 1990, the Mongolian government allowed the monastery to re-open, but did not allocate any funds for its restoration. Money can be offered in exchange for prayers on your behalf, and a receipt will be given.

The temple has an amazing collection of artifacts, most of which were hidden during the many years of purging, and have only recently been returned to the monastery by their guardians. The most valuable piece in the collection must be the religious copper horn that is more than three meters long and was hand-made by the monastery's founder, *Samobaatar*, about 290 years ago. On the left side of the altar, you can see a picture of *Bogdtaan*, the 8th Lama, who died in 1924.

In 1992 a stupa was erected to *Samobaatar's* honor, with a stature inside representing him. The lions and horses in bas-relief, Mongolian symbols of strength, are supporting the religion.

The Shanch Lama Monastery is a member of the Mongolian-American Religious Association.

5 Culture

5.1 Generally

The Mongolian way of life is nomadic and intimately connected with the ways of animals. Despite urbanisation, the traditions of the steppes live on. Even in the cities, most Mongolians continue to live in a *ger*, a large, white felt tent that can be moved easily and has a universal layout: the door always faces south; towards the back and a little to the west is the place of honour set aside for guests; the back of the *ger*, the *khoimor*, is the place for elders and most treasured possessions; and on the back wall is the family altar, with Buddhist images, family photos and suitcases. Get a local to explain the dozens of traditional, religious and superstitious rules and customs associated with gers.

Mongolians have always taken wholeheartedly to Tibetan Buddhism and the links between Mongolia and Tibet are old and deep. Once in a lifetime, every devout Buddhist Mongolian tries to reach the holy city of Lhasa; the Tibetans in turn have relied on various Mongolian tribes to sustain their power. In Mongolia at the time of the communist takeover in 1921, there were 110,000 *lamas* (monks) living in about 700 monasteries. Beginning in the 1930s, thousands of monks were arrested, sent to Siberian labour camps and never heard from again. Monasteries were closed and ransacked and all religious worship and

ceremonies outlawed. Not until 1990 was freedom of religion restored. Since then, there's been a phenomenal revival of Buddhism (and other religions). Monasteries have reopened, and even some ex-Communist Party officials have become lamas. Monasteries and temples (*sūm*) always have Tibetan names. There's a significant minority of Sunni Muslims in the far western regions of Mongolia, most of whom are ethnic Kazaks.

Mongolia's paintings, music and literature are dominated by Tibetan Buddhism and nomadism. *Tsam* dances are performed to exorcise evil spirits and are influenced by nomadism and Shamanism. Outlawed during communism, they're beginning to be performed again. Traditional music involves a wide range of instruments and singing styles. In Mongolian *khoomi* singing, carefully trained male voices produce harmonic overtones from deep in the throat, releasing several notes at once. Traditional music and dance performances aren't complete without a touch of contortionism, an ancient Mongolian tradition.

Mongolian, the official language, is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Turkish, Kazak, Uzbek and Korean. Since 1944, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet has been used to write Mongolian. The country has produced a huge literature, almost none of which is known to speakers of European languages. Only recently have scholars translated the most important text of all - *Mongol-un Niguchua Tobchiyan (The Secret History of the Mongols)* - which celebrates Mongolia's days of greatness.

An old Mongolian saying goes something like: 'Breakfast, keep for yourself; lunch, share with your friends; dinner, give to your enemies'. The biggest and most important meals for Mongolians are breakfast and lunch, which will usually consist of boiled mutton with lots of fat and flour and maybe some dairy products or rice. The Kazaks in western Mongolia add variety to their diet with horse meat. The Mongolians are big tea drinkers and the classic drink is *süütei tsai* (salty tea). Men who refuse to drink *arkhi* (vodka) are considered wimps, while herders make their own unique home brew *airag*, which is fermented horse's milk with an alcoholic content of about 3%. Many Mongolians distill it further to produce *shimiin arkhi*, which boosts the alcohol content to around 12%.

5.2 Mongolian People, Lifestyle and Culture

Mongolian Culture is unique and dissimilar to anywhere else on earth. It isn't so much individual parts that are fascinating but the combination of history, traditions and customs that makes Mongolia a truly special experience. Certainly the best place to experience culture is in the countryside where the nomadic herders have lived in much the same way for hundreds of years.

5.2.1 People

Archaeological finds suggest that primitive man appeared in what is now Mongolia 300,000 to 350,000 years ago and recent investigations suggest that Mongols take their origin from the Huns (or Huunu) who lived in Central Asian Countries many years ago.

The term 'Mongol' only gained prominence in the early 13th Century with the emergence of the Mongolian ethnic unit and the formation of a single state. The word 'Mongol' has two suggested meanings. The first is a geographical name 'Mon gol' which means the river Mon. The second suggestion is that it should be pronounced 'Mun gol', interpreting 'Mun' as correct, basic or true and 'gol' as pivot, centre or essence. The combination would then be 'true essence'.

The development of the present ethnic composition has gone through several historical stages. The formation and disintegration of numerous military tribal alliances of ancient nomads and their mass migrations over vast expanses of the Euro-Asian steppes, resulted in the emergence of the Mongolian Nationality which consists 86% of Khalkh-Mongol tribes. The population of Mongolia consists of twenty ethnic groups although there are few differences in language. Only the Kazakhs speak in their mother tongue. Kazakhs, Derbets, Buryats and other national minorities are concentrated where they have always lived.

The 1998 population of Mongolia was estimated to be 2.42 million, showing an increase of 1.4% compared to 1997. However, even today, there are more Mongolians living outside Mongolia than in it. 49.6% of the population are male. In 1998, the percentage of the population aged under 15 years was 35.6 and over 65 years, 3.9%. The population density is around 1.5 people per square kilometre. Seventy-two percent of the population are in the labour force.

There are approximately five hundred and twenty thousand families of which one hundred and seventy thousand are herders. The others live in urban centres. Approximately 51% of the population is urbanised, 27% in Ulaanbaatar. The birth rate is 2.06%, the death rate 6.6% and infant mortality rate 3.5%.

5.2.2 Lifestyle

The Mongols are shy by nature. They often hide their confusion or embarrassment behind a smile. Most of the Mongols are taciturn, reticent, tolerant, and some people say, superstitious. Fussiness and inconsistency are considered undignified. At the same time, the Mongol may grow very excited when playing a game, or boil over in anger.

The Mongols do not like to talk about unpleasant things. It is believed that such talk may invoke trouble. It is even more impermissible to say bad things about friends and acquaintances. If at times something unpleasant has to be said, people try to do it as tactfully and inoffensively as possible. On the other hand, expressions of good will and praise are widespread. Praise of their mother country, the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the host, etc., presents a special form of folklore. Foreign guests remark on Mongolian friendliness. The hard conditions of life, far from embittering them, gave rise to the long-standing traditions of friendliness and hospitality. The host is well aware that the wayfarer entering his ger is tired and may still have a long way to go. Of course, he has also found himself in similar situations more than once. And so he does his best to anticipate and satisfy his guest's wishes.

Such specific features as Mongolia's vast sparsely populated area, its rigorous climate and nomadic economy could not fail to make their imprint on the people's behaviour and the manner in which they express their thoughts and sentiments. Over the centuries the people of the steppe have developed their own ethics of social conduct.

There are many types of greeting in the Mongolian language that are used depending on the situation and the time. The townsfolk usually say "Sain bainuu?" which is equivalent to "How are you?" The expected answer is "Sain", which means "Fine". National ethics do not permit a negative answer. It is only later in conversation that you may mention your problems if you have any.

Countrymen often salute each other with the question "Are you wintering well?" or "Are you spending this spring in peace?" Needless to say, the greeting should suit the season. Shepherds ask each other "Are sheep grazing in peace?" or "Are your sheep fattening well?"

The word "peace" often figures in greetings and good wishes. In the Mongolian semantics it is equivalent to happiness. After all, when a person has no worries, he is at peace and, consequently, happy.

In the village, the guest finding his host or hostess at work expresses specific good wishes. For instance, if the hostess is milking the cow, he says, "May your bucket be brim full of milk." If she is beating wool, he says, "May the wool be as soft as silk." If the family are playing some game, his wish will be that everyone should win if only once. The answer to good wishes is always the same: "May it be as you say."

When you are talking to an elderly person whom you know you are expected to add the respectful "guay" to his name, for instance, Dorj-guay. Addressing a stranger who is older than you, say "Akh-aa" which can be translated as older brother or uncle.

Family Relations also have their ethics. We say for instance, "My Wife" and the "Father of my children". One always has to use the correct form of address depending on the person's age or position.

If in the cities a foreigner may safely behave like elsewhere in the world, in the countryside at every step he stumbles against all kinds of customs and traditions that he violates without even knowing it. Especially in the remote regions where traditions and customs are stronger. True, people are not offended if foreigners do something the wrong way because of their ignorance. "The ignorant will not be punished", the Mongols say.

In Mongolia it is not accepted to knock at the door of a ger or say, "Can I come in?" The guest as he approaches the ger is supposed to shout loudly, "Hold the dog!" ("Nokhoi Khori!" in Mongolian) even if there is no dog, for what he actually means is to let the host know that he is coming.

The host and hostess emerge from the ger wearing their hats and buttoned-up delds. As for the hats, if in Europe men take off their hats when greeting each other, in Mongolia the rules of good behaviour demand that they wear their hats in such cases.

The host helps the guest dismount from his horse and takes him into the ger.

To begin with, the men exchange snuff bottles. Never mind if you do not have one. You should accept the host's snuff bottle, take some snuff and return it. The bottle should never be returned with the lid tightly on. Then the hostess begins to serve tea, often made in the guest's presence. It is not acceptable to ask the guest outright where he comes from and for what purpose. He should say this himself at some point during the conversation or after asking the traditional questions about the weather, the cattle, etc.

The hostess serves tea in a small bowl, holding it with both hands stretched out towards the guest, or with the right hand supporting the elbow with the left arm. The guest is supposed to accept the cup in the same fashion. It would be very proper to let down the sleeves for it is considered extremely impolite to expose your wrists.

The Mongols have their own ideas about the hearth, the ger and what is inside it, and the guest should take care to respect the old taboos. It is forbidden, for example, to pour water on the hearth or throw garbage into it, to touch the fire with a knife, step over the hearth or spill milk. Whistling in the ger or leaning against the supports is considered an ill omen.

In summer the host will offer you koumiss (fermented mare's milk) instead of tea.

To establish friendly relations it is customary to eat off a common plate and drink from a common cup, notably koumiss. The host fills the cup and hands it over to the guest. The latter drinks a little and returns the cup to the host who refills the cup and hands it over to another guest. The host drinks after all his guests have drunk from the cup.

Nobody will insist on the faultless observance of all the customs and rules but learning at least some before a visit to Mongolia would please your hosts and allow you to get a real feel of Mongolian culture.

5.2.3 Food

The Mongolian diet really depends on where you are in Mongolia and what time of year it is. In the south a staple diet of mutton and camel with camel dairy products is the norm. However, in the Khangai Mountains, beef is more common. In the city of Ulaanbaatar, there is a much larger range of foods, for both Mongolian and Foreign people. The Mongolian climate means that the calorific intake needs to be higher in the winter months than in the summer. For this reason, herders will often eat boiled animal fat.

Vegetables are a relatively recent addition to the Mongolian diet. In the past dairy products and undercooked meat compensated the vitamin shortage. Some dishes were seasoned with wild onions and garlic.

Mongolians believe that the most parts of their livestock can be eaten. Sheep are slaughtered by a traditional method, which allows the meat to stay clean, and which prevents heavy blood loss. A cut is made in the chest of the sheep and the heart artery is severed. The carcass is divided into several large parts . neck, brisket, ribs, blades, loin, rump and legs. Boned meat is used to make several dishes including bansh and buutz.

In the countryside food tends to be cooked once a day, unless guests arrive. In the morning and afternoon, milk tea is drunk with Boortsog (butter biscuits fried in oil) and meat boiled the night before. Food is only cooked for summer. Most of the time it is boiled meat and broth to which noodles, rice or other groats are added to taste.

Boodog is perhaps the most traditional Mongolian dish. It is prepared from goat or marmot meat. Removing the bones and bowels from the skinned carcass through the neck, they put red-hot stones inside and close the neck opening. Then the carcass is barbecued. The meat roasted this way is tender, tasty and fragrant.

The bowels of slaughtered sheep and goats are used for making sausage. The process appears simple at first sight: the thoroughly rinsed intestines are stuffed with finely chopped bowels, fat and blood and spices, salt, onions or garlic are added. But only a good housewife knows what components to use and in what proportions.

The Mongol's nomadic way of life and the country's climatic conditions have given rise to specific methods of preserving meat. The most widespread one is air-drying. Beef is cut into long strips that are hung in the shade. The meat dries very quickly, becoming so hard that you cannot cut it with a knife. Before use, dried meat is powdered and then put into boiling water.

With the advent of spring and the beginning of calving and lambing, Mongols switch to dairy products including koumiss. It would be hard to list all the dishes prepared from the milk of the five domestic animals. There are all kinds of sour milk, curds and cheese that are eaten separately or in dishes made with them, which have their specific names. The same dishes prepared from milk of different animals differ from each other. Preference is usually given to cow's milk.

Foreigners who have visited Mongolia notice that Mongols always boil milk and never use it all by itself. They either dilute it with hot water to obtain the so-called khyaram or add it to tea. Salt and milk are indispensable components of Mongolian tea. Mongols use a variety of tea pressed into large cubes. This variety only grows in Central Asia and China.

Mongolian women make urum, or so-called white butter, from milk. The process is simple enough. Boiling milk is stirred with a dipper until a thick layer of skin is formed. The skin is poured off, cooled and dried. If placed in a wooden barrel or leather bag, it keeps well all winter. Urum is served to the guest first as a light snack, which can be eaten by itself or with cheese or dried curds, or it can be put into tea.

By melting urum, yellow butter or shar-tos is obtained. This can be preserved all winter for frying gambira, Mongolian Cakes. Aruul is believed to be behind Mongolians' strong and healthy teeth. Aruul is curdled milk, dehydrated and thoroughly dried in the air and sun. There is practically no limit to its shelf life. Hard dried curds are almost impossible to chew and have to be sucked.

Herders have prepared koumiss for several centuries. Mare's or Camel's milk is collected in a leather bag and churned. It is believed that koumiss contains A, C and some B vitamins and arrests the growth and proliferation of pathogenic microorganisms. Furthermore, it is supposed to be effective against lung and stomach diseases, braces up the nervous system and improves appetite and digestion. Aged koumiss sparkles slightly and is pleasantly acid to the taste. Underdone koumiss may upset the stomach while overdone koumiss is very sour and intoxicating. Although the method of preparing koumiss is the same, it tastes different in different parts of the country. This is explained, above all, by the difference in the fodder given to the animals and the specific additives varying from region to region. Koumiss and milk symbolise happiness. The white colour sacred to the Mongols makes koumiss an indispensable part of the meal during celebrations and festivities.

The habit of sour milk distillation has survived in some places in Mongolia. Five degrees of distillation are known: arkhi, arz, khorz, sharz and dun. As a rule, arkhi (or vodka) is consumed. It is also called shimiyn arkhi or Mongol arkhi to distinguish from commercially produced vodka. Mongol arkhi is about 10-12° proof, tasteless and transparent. Since it takes a lot of time and skill to produce it, many Mongols now prefer to buy stronger drinks.

5.2.4 Language

Mongolian, belongs to the Altai group of languages (which include Finnish, Turkish, Kazak, Uzbek and Korean. It is spoken by about 7 million people in the world including Mongolians, Inner Mongolians, Buriyats, Kalkmycks and Tuvinians. In Mongolian speech organs such as the nose and larynx take relatively less participation but tongue, teeth, palate and lips take an active part in producing sounds. It is a language rich in vocabulary so it has an ample opportunity to translate from any foreign language rendering the meaning of different expressions and ideas.

Because of the specific mode of life, customs and environments, there are a lot of terms and expressions not easy to translate into other languages and render their meanings. There are also many proverbs relating to Mongolian life (for example: While your father is alive, get acquainted with people, while you have horses, go and see far away lands.)

The Mongol script has five main vowels and 22 consonants and is written vertically. It can be written quickly and therefore considered similar to shorthand. In many cases, the Mongolian writing system does not correspond with pronunciation. In this respect it is similar to written and spoken English. Because of these complications, Mongols tried to adopt the Square (Pags-pa) script in 1269, the Todu Script in 1648, the Soyombo Script in 1686 and the Cyrillic Script in 1941.

The latter, Cyrillic Script was successfully adopted unlike the others, and helped to erase illiteracy among the population. The Mongolian Cyrillic Alphabet has 35 letters. There have been attempts to revive the old Mongolian Script but so far, there has been little success.

5.2.5 Clothing

The del is the Mongols' traditional garment worn on both workdays and special days. It is a long, loose gown cut in one piece with the sleeves; it has a high collar and widely overlaps at the front. The del is girdled with a sash.

Each ethnic group living in Mongolia has its own del distinguished by cut, colour and trimming. The distinctions go unnoticed by foreigners, yet for the Mongols they are obvious.

Before the revolution, all social strata in Mongolia had their own manner of dressing. Livestock-breeders, for example, wore plain dels, which served them both summer and winter. The priests wore yellow dels with a cape or khimj, thrown over it. Secular feudal lords put on smart hats and silk waistcoats.

Today, townspeople tend to wear European-style clothes. In the countryside, however, the modern attire is inconvenient and impractical. The del has several uses . as a coat, as a blanket, and as means of concealing yourself when going to the toilet on the open steppe. In the cities, as people start aging, especially the women, begin to appreciate the advantages of the del and wear it, trying to excel each other in the choice of fabric, as well as in the elegance of the cut and originality of the trimmings. Commonly there are three varieties of del, each for a particular season. The first, the dan del, is very much like a dress, a frock cut in one piece from plain cloth without padding. Rural women wear dan dels all year around. In cold weather they put on warm clothes over them. Terleg is a slightly padded del. And finally the winter del is padded with sheepskin or cotton wool. Dels for men and women are of the same cut. The difference is that male dels are wider and of more demure colours. The pattern is simple enough. The sleeves are cut together with the gown and there are only a few minor details. Moreover the tailor does not have to worry about the precise length and width.

Measurements are usually made using the hand rather than a tape measure. The 'too' is the distance between the thumb and the middle finger, the 'soom' the distance between the thumb and the forefinger and the 'khuruu' the length of the forefinger.

The del for everyday wear is grey, brown or some other dark colour, while the holiday del is a bright blue, green or claret silk with a silk sash of contrasting colour several metres long. The sash is not simply an adornment. It also serves as a soft corset facilitating long rides on horseback. In days gone by, men would attach a sheathed knife, a tobacco pouch, a flint and a pipe-cleaning hook to the belt. Characteristically, the Mongol always hid his pipe in his boots.

The del collar, breasts and sleeves are trimmed with leather and colour brocade tape, which can be wide or narrow depending on the wearer's taste. The del buttons, if they are not commercially produced from decorative stones or silver, are narrow strips of cloth tied into intricate knots.

Traditional dels are normally seen now only at concerts or official occasions.

In addition to the del is the jacket known as a khurim. In cold weather it is put on over the del. The gutil is the high boot made from unbending leather and lined with fine and thin felt. They are decorated with different designs. Both the left and right are traditionally the same shape and were worn with thick socks made from quilted cloth. Traditional boots are without heels and have turned up toes. Mongolian hats are still very much the normal attire in the countryside. The traditional hat is a hat for all seasons trimmed with fur, fox fur in most cases. The sides of the hat can be tied down to keep the ears warm or tied on top in the warmer periods. The hats are worn by both men and by women. In the past, headgear was worn to show social status. The design is also symbolic. The pointed top of the hat represents Mount Sumer, the legendary land of the Mongol forefathers. The knot on the top represents the unity of the nation, red ribbons are the sun's rays and the broad brim represents the country's inaccessibility.

Because of the different ethnic groups residing in Mongolia, there are distinctions in the way they all dress. Therefore it is estimated that between them all, there are about 400 different types of garments, 20 boots, 10 sashes and 20 types of hats.

5.2.6 Music & Singing

Music is an important part of Mongolian culture. This is particularly the case in the countryside as families and friends will sing and play music together as a past time. A visitor to a countryside ger will often be coaxed into a song. Mongolians sing to their animals, sing about the environment, sing about nomadic lifestyles and sing about their patriotism.

Khoomi singing is a traditional form of song which comes from deep in the throat. Well trained voices are able to produce a whole range of sounds at once. The different combinations of sounds are said to represent the different landscapes within Mongolia.

Urtyn Duu or Long Songs are another form of vocal music, so called because of their length. Some famous singers have been able to memorise 20,000 verses. Most of the songs relate to stories about love or the countryside and are apparently best sung on horseback galloping across the steppe.

The most traditional of instruments is the morin huur or horse head fiddle. With two strings made from horse hair and a carved horse's head it is most often used to accompany singing. Legend suggests the sounds produced are similar to those of the nomad's animals. The other instrument most often played is the Yatga (similar to a sitar).

Music is often played at traditional and religious gatherings such as weddings.

5.2.7 Festivals

Tsagaan Tsar

Although winter is long in Mongolia and it may be very cold in March and April, it is an accepted practice to mark the advent of Spring in February.

It coincides with the New Year celebrations according to the oriental lunar calendar. Some researchers believe that the lunar calendar was invented by the nomadic tribes of Central Asia. Living in contact with nature and noticing the natural cycles, the nomads had long organised their life according to the lunar phases. Old sources testify to the existence of the Mongolian lunar calendar with twelve months in a year to which an extra month was added every four years. Each month had its own name, for example, Cuckoo, Deer, Flood. Later, the Tibetans and Chinese rationalised the calendar.

The calendar uses a base system of twelve, with the century consisting of twelve years, the year of twelve months and the day of 12 hours. According to Mongol-Tibetan cosmology, the world is built on the interaction of five elements . iron, earth, fire, water and wood . whose colours are white, yellow, red, black and blue respectively. Each year comes five times under the signs of the five elements, thus making a sixty year cycle.

Tsagaan Tsar translates as White Month. The origins of the name can be related to white symbolising happiness and purity or the fact that it is the start of the lactating and breeding periods. The approaching spring brings an abundance of milk and dairy products. The holiday is dependent on the phases of the moon and falls anywhere between the end of January and early March. Families start preparing for the holiday at least a month in advance. First of all there is a tradition to prepare plenty of gifts and food. Gers, sheds and pens should be cleaned out. Every Mongol family makes hundreds of Buutz and makes or buys new clothes. According to custom, the fattest sheep should be killed and the lower back and tail boiled and served on the table for the entire holiday. Tsagaan Tsar symbolises wealth and prosperity in the family.

The New Year's Eve is called 'Bituun' . the last dinner of the old year. Beginning at noon, the wife starts cleaning the ger. Everything must be spotless. Then the table, the centrepiece of celebrations is laid with several dishes . the boiled sheep's back, a dish with traditional bread biscuits, a dish of beresee (rice cooked with butter, sugar and raisins) and a dish with traditional milk products (aruul, unsalted cheese and cream). All these dishes should be eaten that evening after the stars have come out. Incense sticks and candles are lit and strong tea is made. The first drinking bowl is sprinkled to the four parts of the globe, the second is presented to the host and then the other guests can drink. The host takes one sip and then touches the sacrum nine times with his hand. This is the sign for the hostess to serve tea, first to the oldest and then the children. After the traditional ceremony which proceeds any meal in Mongolia, the host begins to cut the lamb sacrum, the carcass is distributed among them. After that the other above mentioned dishes are served in a sequence. Incidentally, according to the custom, strong drinks can only be by people older than 40.

The following morning everyone rises bright and early according to tradition. There are many customs to follow. The first is to greet the sun; everyone watches the sun rise. Second, in order to have good health and happiness in the new year, each individual must take their 'first steps of the New Year'. The lunar year of birth and the current year will dictate which direction you will need to walk.

After the first steps are taken, all family members re-enter their home and start the Tsagaan Tsar greetings. The oldest member is greeted first and sits at the northern side of the ger. The next oldest member of the family then greets him or her and carries a khadag . a piece of blue silk . across their palms. A cup filled with milk is placed in the right hand on the silk. The greeting normally said is "Sar shin saikhan shinelch baina uu?" as the milk and khadag are given to the oldest member of the family. The younger member of the family has his or her palms facing upwards and grasps the older one's elbows. The older member has palms faced down and the arms are above the younger's. While this is occurring, the two kiss one another on the cheek or touch cheeks.

On this day, all family members show their respect and love through this greeting. After the second oldest member has finished the greeting, the other family members greet the oldest member. They continue to greet one another and give gifts. The value of the gift is not important. A packet of cigarettes and some socks will suffice. The important thing is consideration. Older people are given khadags and younger people, sweets. Often each member of the family and guests will offer their snuff bottles to one another.

In the past countryside residents would honour nature by going to an ovoo . a pile of stones raised on a hill or mountain top. People would go there with trays of food and other offerings and the oldest would voice words of gratitude and praise to the spirit of the mountain and the neighbourhood.

At Tsagaan Tsar, as on other holidays, people sing songs. The host serves a drink to his guests in turn and he who gets the cup should rise to his feet and sing a song to be supported by everyone else present. It is considered impolite to refuse to sing, "to demonstrate one's talents" as the Mongols say.

On the first evening of the New Year, people also play games. They play khorol . a kind of domino cut from wood and with pictures of lunar animals and shagai or dice.

After the greetings, the food is placed on the table and the eating and drinking begins again. The hostess continually cooks, serves and cleans, with the help of her children, as visitors come and go. The greetings and gift-giving continue all day and up to the fifteenth day after Tsagaan Tsar. The holiday is then said to be finished although in the cities, it is finished a lot earlier.

Naadam & the Three Manly Sports

The sports most popular with the Mongols since ancient times are wrestling, horse racing and archery. Together they form Eriin Gurvan Naadam . the three manly sports.

The three manly sports make up the core program of the National Day festivity which has been held annually for the past two centuries. Earlier, Naadam was often associated with religious ceremonies (worshipping the spirit of the mountains, the rocks and the rivers). At present it is a national holiday held 11-13th July each year to commemorate the Mongol People's Revolution. This tradition was set by D.Sukhbaatar, the founder of the people's state in 1922, when competitions in national types of sport were held to commemorate the first anniversary of the People's Revolution.

On July 11 local competitions are also held in some Aimags and Sums to choose the best sportsmen of that area. Small contests involve over a hundred athletes and some larger ones have over a thousand.

The Naadam Festival is now a major tourist attraction. The first day starts with a colourful marching display of soldiers outside Government House in Sukhbaatar Square, playing brass instruments and being accompanied by Mongolians dressed in warrior outfits. The opening ceremony takes place at the Naadam Stadium with more marching by the military, athletes and monks. A similar closing ceremony takes place on the second day in the evening. The horse racing is held a small distance away from the

stadium at a place called Yarmag. There is always plenty to see and it's even possible to pitch a tent along with all the competitors.

The traditional style of wrestling has its own long-standing ritual. Each wrestler wears ornamental knee boots with upturned toes, tight trunks and an open-fronted, long sleeved vest of silk. With arms imitating the flight of a bird, he performs the eagle dance, which symbolises power and invincibility.

Supposedly, the vest was changed in design to an open-fronted vest after a woman was found to have taken part in the event and won!

By ancient tradition, when a wrestler appears before spectators, his posture and body movements should resemble those of a lion and his arms should imitate the flight of the mythical bird of Gharid. It is difficult to present a likeness of a bird never seen by anyone, but centuries old wrestling traditions and experienced heralds have come to help. There are a variety of tricks in Mongol wrestling, which require not only strength but perfect technique. The most important thing is the utmost plasticity of body movement. The one who forces his rival to kneel on the ground or to touch it with his elbow is the winner. The winner does the eagle's dance, with his opponent passing under his arm (as though under a wing) as a sign of submission.

National wrestling is held in several rounds, depending on the number of participants, which also determines the duration of the competition. Before the People's Revolution, 1028 participants used to take part in the competition, which could last up to 7 days. The competition attracted fans from many different quarters, sometimes from the most remote places.

Nowadays, during the National Day celebrations, some 512 contestants usually take part in the wrestling competition, the winner is known after 9 rounds. Hundreds of wrestlers from different cities take part in the competition. The losers must quit the competition, but depending on the number of victories, the winners are honoured with ancient titles. The winner of the fifth round gets the title of falcon, of the seventh and eighth rounds elephant and of the tenth and eleventh rounds, lion. The wrestler who has two consecutive champion titles is awarded the title of Titan. Every subsequent victory at the National Naadam will add an epithet (additional titles to consecutive winners) to his average title, like Invincible Titan, or Invincible Titan to be remembered by all.

Children start to learn wrestling from an early age and although it appears as play, the youngsters take their wrestling seriously. The second element of the Three Manly Sports is horse racing. Originally, adults took part in this competition, and the most popular contests were in riding previously unbroken horses. Later, so as to ease the burden on horses in long-distance races, the adults were replaced by children aged from six to ten, who quickly master the art of riding. Horse racing is organised in celebration of the National Day and the traditional New Year. Tsagaan Tsar and on other notable occasions.

Horses aged two years and above take part. Mostly there are seven groups. two, three, four, and six year olds, stallions and amblers. Horse training begins two or three months prior to Naadam. Each rider has his own ways and methods which he is usually reluctant to reveal. During training the trainer finds the best pastures for the horse to graze on. Of course, the goal of the trainer is to get the horse into the best shape possible. For this purpose, the horse is trained during the hottest time of the day and driven uphill with sheepskin wrapped around its body. Besides that, the horse has to be taught not to stop during the race no matter what may happen. Cases are known of little riders falling off the horse which nevertheless ran on and was first at the finish.

Depending on the age of the horses, distances vary from 5 to 30 km (30km was the distance between two postal stations in olden days). All participants start simultaneously. The winner is honoured with a cup of airag which he drinks and sprinkles on the head and rear of the horse. The first five horses are sprinkled with airag; they are commonly known as Airagyn tav. After the race, some of the best singers in the country congratulate the best riders and their horses with their songs of praise and congratulations.

The third element of the national competitions is archery, which has been perfected over centuries. Sharpshooters used to hit the head of a marmot from a distance of 100. Small round leather targets are put at a distance of 60-100 m from the archers. The archers wear a special glove on the thumb and index finger of the right hand and wrap the left arm up to the elbow in soft belts. The arrow has blunt bone heads. The referees, lined up to the targets, mark each hit. When the target is hit they raise their hands and move around the spot singing a shot song of praise. The best archer receives the title of mergen (marksman)

5.2.8 Sports

Mongolia's most popular sports, both in terms of participation and spectating are the three 'manly' sports of wrestling, archery and horseracing. In addition, the younger generation are now enjoying snooker, basketball and winter sports. For more information on the major sports, see the section above.

5.2.9 Traditional Medicine

Traditional Mongolian Medicine has made a revival after the communist era, due to the lack of western medicines and the incurability of some diseases. Based on Tibetan, Indian and Chinese medicine, traditional medicine has been used here since the late 17th century when it was founded by Luvsandanzanjantsan. It is believed that all manner of physical, mental and psychological ailments can be cured through the use of herbs, mineral water, plants and animal parts. The diagnosis and treatment are based on the five elements of fire, water, earth, wood and wind. The medicines are administered according to one's metabolism, the weather and the season. Prayers are said and acupuncture along with massage are considered important parts of the treatment.

5.2.10 The Ger

The Mongolian Ger is ideally suited to the country's extremes of climate and the people's nomadic way of life. It is a multipurpose dwelling that can be easily collapsed, transported to another place and put up again fully preserving its original shape. Being constantly on the move with herds of animals or being on military campaigns compelled Mongols to build gers on carts. Old books contain pictures of such gers, temporary abodes in which families of three or four could spend the night or find shelter. After some time the use of carts stopped because they were clumsy and the gers could not be hauled over long distances as there was the danger of getting stuck in the mud somewhere or tipping over.

The ger has two key components . the wooden framework and the felt cover. The wooden parts are the walls, the long poles, the round smoke escape and its supports. One wall consists of 10-15 wooden poles, each about 1.5m high, bound together in a way making it possible to fold it for transportation and then unfold like an accordion. The unfolded walls are connected to form a circle. The long poles are fastened to the upper part of the walls, with the other end passed through the round support at the top of the ger, the only window and smoke escape in the ger. Two posts prop up the round support. All this forms the wooden framework of the ger, which resembles an open umbrella. Two layers of felt are then laid on the roof and on the walls and tied down with hair rope. The top of the ger has a felt flap that can be drawn over the roof when the weather is bad. Inside the ger, felt is laid either on a wooden floor or straight on the ground. The door of the ger always faces south towards the sun. The number of walls and poles determines the size of the ger. Most herders' gers have five walls, which make a living area of 16-18 sq. m. Larger gers can have up to 12 walls.

In the centre of the ger is the hearth, which has a special meaning for the Mongols. Apart from its utilitarian purpose, the hearth symbolizes ties with ancestors. There are several customs associated with hearth. Desecration of the hearth is a sin and an insult to the master of the house. The hearth is mounted on three stones, which symbolize the host, the hostess and the daughter-in-law. The hearth is the centre of the ger and divides the ger space into three conventional areas . the male and female quarters and the khoimor.

The male quarters are on the western side. Here the host keeps the saddle, the horse bridle and the koumiss bag. The female quarters are on the eastern side where she keeps the kitchenware and appliances.

Accordingly, a man entering the ger goes straight to the western part and a woman to the eastern part. It is believed that the male quarters are under the protection of heaven and the sun patronizes the female quarters. The most honoured place is the khoimor by the northern wall, opposite the door. Here, they keep objects dear to the master of the house, his weapons, his Morin Huur (musical instrument) and the host's horse bridle. Pieces of furniture, usually two wooden chests, painted bright orange, are also placed in the khoimor. Framed photographs of the host's family and friends are put on the chests for everyone to see. If the host has some governmental award, he is sure to hang it in the khoimor.

When guests visit, the hosts usually sit on the eastern side of the khoimor and the guests on the western side. The hostess' place is by the hearth and the children are supposed to sit near her but closer to the door.

The bed of the host and hostess is in the female quarters; those for guests are on the opposite side. The children are put to sleep at their parents' feet.

There are many philosophical ideas on the ger, its parts and functions. The smoke escape is the only opening through which light penetrates the ger. An old legend has it that it was through such a hole that a fair-haired man got into the ger of Alangua, the Mongols' ancestral mother, and begot three sons. In olden days people could tell the time by the sun's rays falling on the cross-pieces of the smoke escape and on the poles. The Mongols divided the day into twelve hours and each hour into twelve minutes, which they called by the names of the lunar calendar animals.

A hair rope, chagtaga, is fastened to the smoke escape from which a weight stabilising the ger is suspended during strong winds. In new gers, they fasten a khadag to it, a piece of blue silk in which a handful of grain is wrapped. The symbolism of this ritual can be summed up like this . "May happiness multiply in this new ger like grains of corn and may life be pure and beautiful here."

The ger supports ensure stability and that is probably why tradition forbids touching, let alone leaning against them. Moreover, they symbolise a link with Heaven, with the past-present-future axis supposedly passing through them.

In winter the hearth heats the ger and also serves as a stove for cooking. In wooded areas, the hearth is stocked with firewood while in the desert and steppe, dry dung is used. The ger warms up quickly and holds in the heat. In the summer heat the lower part of the felt cover is raised to let in fresh air.

The ger, round and squat, can withstand harsh winds while the quick drying felt is good protection against the rain and snow. In the towns and urban-type settlements, gers are being ousted by modern well-built housing. Young Mongols prefer to live in comfortable flats. In summer, however, urban dwellers often spend their vacations in gers, leaving the urban conveniences for a short while to enjoy the unmatched comfort of the ger.

5.2.11 Religion

Interest in Buddhism as a national religion began with Chinggis Khan. He employed the Buddhist Uigur people as teachers and state officials. The Uigur were a respected people and had great cultural influence over the Mongols. Chinggis Khan also held meetings with Buddhist leaders during his reign. In his will, he instructed his successor, Ogedei Khan to invite a Tibetan lama to conduct Buddhist services at Kharakhorum. This engaged practicing Shamans in Kharakhorum, as pantheistic Shamanism was the traditional faith of the Mongols.

Buddhism was not fully adopted as a state religion until the rule of Kubila Khan. He declared Buddhism to be the Yuan empire's official religion. Kubila Khan appointed the lama Lodijaltsan as spiritual leader and state teacher for the country.

Lamas were officially exempted from military service and paying taxes. Despite these efforts by Kubila Khan, Buddhism did not become a widely-accepted religion in Mongolia. It was the religion of the aristocracy, and following the Tibetan empire's downfall, Buddhism lost its support and Shamanism was revived through to the mid sixteenth century. In the second half of the sixteenth century, Yellow Hat sect Buddhism or Lamaism became prominent in Mongolia. Lamaism was adopted for political as well as social reasons. Politically, Lamaism was favoured because (1) Mongol aristocrats wanted their positions reinforced by religious figures, (2) Tibetan Yellow Hat proponents sought allies among the Mongol rulers against the Red Hat sect, and (3) the Ming empire in China saw Lamaism as a means of pacifying their warlike Mongol neighbours.

In 1577, Altan Khan invited the religious head of Tibet to Mongolia, as Altan Khan was intent upon unifying Mongolia under Lamaism. Altan Khan incorporated Buddhist beliefs into laws which made for a legal basis to abolish the practices of Shamanism. Altan Khan's campaign was continued by Avtai Sain Khan, who met with the third Dalai Lama in 1586. At this meeting, it was decided that the Zuu temple in Kharakhorum would be established as the Mongol Centre of Lamaism. Soon thereafter, the other monasteries and schools for Lamaism opened under the directive of Zanabazar, the head of the Lamaist religion in Mongolia. Zanabazar worked diligently to spread Lamaism to all people, nobles and commoners alike. Lamaism continued to gain popularity for the following 200 years, or until the Mongol People's Revolution.

During the period referred to as the "Left Deviation" (1929-1932) approximately 300 monasteries were closed in an effort to increase Mongolia's workforce by encouraging lamas to work outside of the monasteries. Some lamas left in fear of persecution, only to return to the monasteries in 1932, the beginning of the New Turn movement: a movement in which efforts were directed towards persuasion, education and propaganda. By 1936 there were 767 monasteries - including more than 300 closed during 1929-1932 - and over 100,000 lamas, including an increase of 10,000 during the period immediately following the Left Deviation. At this time, the adult lamas represented over forty percent of the adult male population - a problem for a socialist country.

In the mid 1930s, the communist party implemented the "liquidation of the church as an organisation" due, in part, to rumours of the political uprisings against the government being rooted in the monasteries. At this time, lamas were 'strongly encouraged' to leave the monasteries and begin secular lifestyles. By 1938, approximately 20,000 of the lamas had become herders, 5,000 were organised into government cooperatives, young lamas were enlisted in the military and child lamas were returned to their families. And the rest? Many were victims of the burning and bombing of monasteries during the mid 1930s. 1937 is said to be one of the worst years in Mongol history, as hundreds of monasteries were destroyed, tens of thousands of Buddhist books were burned, and most of the 100,000 lamas were persuaded into secular lifestyles or killed.

Over the next 40 years, Mongols worshipped in fear. Older Buddhists continued to attend the central monastery, the Gandan, which averaged 100 lamas, or the Gobi's monastery, which averaged 40 lamas. Younger people worshipped in the privacy of their homes or ceased to worship altogether.

Now that Mongolia is an independent country, the Buddhists are experiencing a revival. Young males are attending the monastery schools and many of the lamas who were forced into secular lives during the 1930s have returned to the monasteries to continue lifestyles they originally chose to pursue. In 1990, the women's monastery was opened in Ulaanbaatar by a group of 20 Buddhist women.

However, all is not calm on the religious front: missionaries are spreading across the country, attempting to convert the Mongols to western religions.

5.2.12 Arts

Mongolian art and culture are almost always based on the nomadic lifestyles of ancestors. Although Ulaanbaatar is now a modern city, there are still many performances of dance, music and drama that are based on history. There is a real renaissance of original culture. For detailed information on Mongolian Art, [Click Here to visit asianart.com](http://asianart.com).

5.2.13 The 12 Year Calendar

The Mongol 12-year calendar has been in use since ancient times. Each of the 12 years distinguish themselves from one another through their own names; all years are named and now symbolised by the following 12 animals . mouse, cow, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog and the pig.

Traditionally, each year has unique characteristics that are similar to its name. For example, the year of the monkey will take on the monkey's personality traits: hyper and rambunctious. The result: a very long, difficult and harsh year.

At one point in time many Mongols wondered where and how this calendar was derived. As a result, a tale was created. The following is a short version of the tale.

Once upon a time during the ancient Hunuu times, God decided to create a "pattern of time". One day he made an announcement to the people: "I am creating a 12 year calendar ; however, I need 12 different names to distinguish each year. I've decided that tomorrow afternoon . the first twelve things that appear before me will receive one of the names, until I have named all 12." So, the following day, animals appeared before him. The first 11 were monkey, cow, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, cock, dog and pig. However, the 12th animal that appeared before him were 2; the camel and the mouse. God did not know which to choose. Both would be good representatives because he created both. The camel is proud, big and self-confident and the mouse is the opposite: quiet, shy and modest. God decided to have a contest for the 12th year. The following day, the mouse and camel were to watch for the sun to rise. The first to see it rise would go back immediately to God and tell him. The camel, being proud, propped himself on a hill facing the east where the sun always rises. He was confident that he would see the sun rise first because he thought of himself as very intelligent. The little mouse, sitting on the camel's

hump, faced the west, the opposite direction. Finally, when the sun began to rise, the mouse saw its reflection on the mountains he was staring at. Thus the mouse had won the contest.

Although the camel is not one of the 12 years of the calendar, it is indeed still a part of it. On many written calendars, the camel is often showing. The camel is considered a very important part of Mongol society and its relationship with the calendar is that, in some way, the camel represents all 12 years, or 12 animals. This representation is as follows:

Camel's Characteristic	Other Animal
Ears	Mouse
Stomach	Cow
Hooves	Tiger
Nose	Rabbit
Body	Dragon
Eyes	Snake
Mane	Horse
Hair	Sheep
Humps	Monkey
Head	Cock
Hind Legs	Dog
Tail	Pig

The 12-year calendar is used in many Asian countries. Just as each country likes to believe they created it, Mongolia is no different. However, what's most important is the strong belief in the calendar that the majority of Mongols hold.

5.2.14 Cultural Tips

You are almost inevitably going to encounter the residents of the countryside. Things move slowly here and the standards of living you are used to are not the same. Part of Mongolia's charm is its ancient customs and traditions. If you can learn and respect them before you step into the countryside, then you may get a more welcome reception. You may also become a small part in helping to preserve these traditions for future visitors.

Don't

- let a post or fence come between you if you are walking with Mongolians
- whistle inside a ger or house belonging to a Mongolian
- let your feet point in the direction of the altar (which will be in the north side) when sitting in a ger,
- let people walk over your outstretched legs
- tread on the threshold of the ger when you walk over it
- lean against a support column furniture or wall of the ger
- stamp out a fire or put water or any rubbish on it; fire is sacred
- walk in front of an older person
- turn your back to the altar and religious objects at the back of the ger
- touch other people's hats
- have long conversations in your own language in front of hosts who don't understand it
- point a knife in the direction of anyone
- pass anything to a Mongolian with just two fingers
- take food from a plate with your left hand
- wave you sleeve as it is a mark of protest or extend the little finger of your right hand, as this is a sign of disrespect

Do

- keep your hat on when entering a ger, if you are wearing one, but lift it as a sign of greeting
- receive things with the right hand or both hands and ensure that your sleeves are rolled down
- ensure you remove your gloves when shaking hands, if you are wearing them
- walk round inside the ger in a clockwise direction
- receive food, a gift or anything similar from a Mongolian with both hands or with the right hand supported at the wrist or elbow
- take at least a sip or nibble of the delicacies offered
- pick up things with an open hand, with your palm facing upwards
- grab the hand of a Mongolian if you have accidentally kicked their feet
- sit with your feet underneath you or cross-legged
- leave a small gift, other than money, for your hosts

5.3 Traditions and Customs

A traditional method of greeting, especially in the country side, is for the younger person to hold their arms out, palm up, and grasp the older person just in front of the elbow. The elder does the same, but with palms face-down. This is done mostly during the new year, or when people meet for the first time that year. The embrace looks vaguely Russian, but is missing the ritual kiss, and reminiscent of smelling. Usually only used amongst close relatives.

Asking directions, for example, is never done without some small talk first. Typical questions include asking how a person spent the last season, the condition of their livestock, or inquiring about their personal health.

If invited into a ger, you will be offered tea with milk and salt, and a plate with various cheeses and/or breads. Show your good behaviour by taking at least one small piece.

To show respect when accepting something (like a snuff bottle), hold your right elbow with your left hand, or use both hands together. Even if you don't want to drink alcohol, for example, always accept the bowl, make the gesture as if drinking, and pass it on or put it back. Refusal or pushing something back is not done.

When visiting a temple or monastery, decent clothes are a must. It is a Mongolian habit to keep the arms covered till the wrist. During spring and summer, the most popular drink is '*Airag*', fermented horse milk. The Russians call it '*Koumiss*'. Mongols can drink up to ten liters a day, but you should start off moderately. Stomach problems are common the first time, even for locals. A famous area for this lightly alcoholic drink is Hujirt. Airag from the Gobi tends to be stronger; it depends on the type of grass.

'*Shiming*', or '*Archi*', is another local milk vodka made from horse or cow's milk. It tastes like water, but contains more than five percent alcohol, by volume.

In Mongolia, the given name is more important than the family name, and commonly used. The majority of the Mongolian population still live in the country, and most still prefer to wear the national costume on a daily basis, the Del (smock) and Gutul (high boots). On feast days, men might also wear the Loovuz, the peaked hat.

5.4 *Here are some tips to help you with the locals*

- If you are asked how are you "San bainau", you must always answer "Sain an bainau" ("I'm well") negative replies are not allowed. If you are really not doing that well at all, you can tell them later!
- You should not knock at the door of a Ger, but instead call "Nokhoi Khor" ("tether your dog!") as you approach your hosts home.
- Never roll up your sleeves in the Ger or it means that you are getting ready to fight you host..!
- Hosts will often wish you well - a suitable reply is to wish that their sheep fatten or their horses grow up strongly. Whistling in the Ger or leaning against the upright supports is very bad luck!
- A guest is suppose to tell the host where he has come from and why - a host would be considered rude to ask if the guest did not offer the information freely.
- Mongolian men traditionally offer each other their snuff boxes - it is rude to refuse. Similarly if visiting nomads a token gift (some postcards, a pair of socks, almost anything) is traditional - your host equally may not refuse your gift even if he hates it!
- Mongolian Tea (main ingredients are hot water, milk, butter, salt, rice, and sometimes tea) will be served in little bowls. Your bowl will be constantly refilled until you upturn it, saying that you have had enough. You will be offered the tea bowl by your hostess with both hand - you should take it with both of yours as a mark of respect for their hospitality.
- It is supposed to be very unlucky to eat fish. Many Mongols refuse to eat vegetables for health reasons.
- "Breaking the slumber of the earth" (i.e. cutting, ploughing, digging soil) is supposed to be very unlucky, and many Mongols refuse to have anything to do with it - hence the Ger - dwellings etc&

5.5 *The Mongolian Ger*

The '*ger*' has evolved from ancient times to suit the needs of the Mongolian people following their herds in search of new pastures. The collapsible and easily transportable ger continues to be used in modern times, but it is quickly giving way to more permanent housing.

The traditional ger has a lattice-work frame of narrow birch willow boards held together by leather strips. The sections are about 230 cm long and bound together to form a large circular structure with a height of 150 to 180 cm. This collapsible lattice is called '*khana*'.

The size of a ger is determined by the number of khana used. The average ger uses six to eight khana, with the door-frame as a separate unit, and the ceiling formed from an umbrella-like frame-work of slender poles called '*uni*'. In the center of the ceiling is a small hole, a '*toono*', approximately 90 cm across, which allows smoke to escape and fresh air and light to enter.

The entire ger is covered by a layer of thick felt held in place by ropes made of hair and wool. During the summer, one layer is sufficient, but during the winter, two or three layers are necessary. The bottom of the felt is arranged so that it can be raised about 30 cm from the ground to

allow for more ventilation during warm weather. During the winter wood is stacked against the ger to prevent cold air or rain from entering.

A single wooden door opening outward, or a double door opening inward, may be covered by a flap during poor weather and is the sole entrance to a ger. Mongolian gers always face south-east, mainly because the winds come from the north-east.

Customarily, when entering or leaving gers, Mongols open the door flap with their left hand and will always leave from the right side; using the wrong side is considered to bring bad luck. There is also a taboo on stepping on the threshold of a ger, as it is believed to be like stepping on the owner's neck.

Since the floor surface of a nomads ger receives more use than those in most other societies, it is most important. Ordinarily, in laying out their accommodation, a family places as many hides as they have next to the ground. On top of these is placed older felt. The final layer, which is never felt, may be decorated. Wealthy families may cover the ger floor with rugs on top of the

felt.

Due to the life style, the furnishings of Mongol homes are simple and consist of several standard chests and shelves upon which objects are placed. Smaller tables are always present, but play a less important role. Mongols never sit on a table. The family altar, the bed of married couples, and other such objects are precisely defined as to function, which is maintained in a rather formal fashion. Furnishings are placed in a definite position, and members of the family or visitors coming in ordinarily never move the heavy cushions used for seating from one place to another. Mongols regard the right side of the host as the honored side. Thus, just to the right of the bed is the traditional place for the Buddhist altar, sutras, or other religious objects. The central hearth area is regarded as sacred, for fire is sacred to Mongols.

6 History

The Mongolians, or Mongols, as they were previously known, recorded their history for centuries in oral epics, sung by bards, until writing was introduced nearly 800 years ago. Because of their substantial - and mostly unhappy - contacts with neighbouring countries, much has also been written about the Mongolians. Chinese dynastic histories, stretching back 5000 years, tell of the Mongols and their predecessors, describing them as ravenous barbarians greedy for Chinese produce and likening them to wolves.

Archeological digs have uncovered human remains in the Gobi and other regions of Mongolia dating back nearly 500,000 years. Agriculture seems to have preceded nomadic herding of animals, and despite Mongolia's short summers, wheat growing has co-existed with nomadic life for thousands of years. It was only after the Mongols tamed horses, yaks and camels that they took to a nomadic herding lifestyle.

The name 'Mongol' was first recorded by the Chinese during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD). At that time Mongolia was dominated by the Uighurs, a Turkic people who built several cities. The Uighurs were influenced by Christianity and, after taking control of Mongolia, went on to help out the ailing Tang rulers of China, saving them from an internal revolt. The Uighurs controlled most of Mongolia until 840 AD, when they were defeated by the Kyrgyz, who now live in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. The Kyrgyz' lasting legacy in Mongolia is the downward flowing script - the *Secret History* epic and all subsequent Mongolian texts were written in this script until Stalin forcibly replaced it with Russian Cyrillic in the 1940s. The Mongols had little inclination to ally with other nomadic peoples of northern Asia and, until the end of the 12th century, the Mongols were little more than a loose confederation of rival clans. It was in the late 12th century that a 20 year old Mongol named Temujin emerged and managed to unite most of the Mongol tribes. In 1189 he was given the honorary name of Genghis Khan, meaning 'universal king'. No Mongolian leader before or since has united the Mongolians so effectively.

The Genghis Khan imprinted in the memory of the west bears little relation to the Chinggis Khaan revered by Mongolians. Not only is the spelling different: to Europeans, his name lives on as the epitome of mercilessness and warmongering; to the Mongolians, he embodies strength, unity, law and order. He's the young king who united the warring clans, gathered a loyal army (up to 200,000 men), stamped out feuds and gave Mongolians a sense of direction. Genghis set up his capital in present-day Kharkhorin, and launched his important cavalry - built on Mongolia's prized *takhi* horses - against China and Russia. By the time of his death in 1227, the Mongol empire extended from Beijing to the Caspian Sea.

Genghis' grandson, Kublai Khan (circa 1216-94), completed the subjugation of China, ending the Song dynasty (960-1279) and becoming emperor of China's Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Kublai soon realised, though, that the Mongol empire had reached the limits of its expansion. Instead of looking for more wars to fight, Kublai concentrated on keeping the vast empire together. This was the height of the Mongols' glory: the empire stretched from Korea to Hungary and as far south as Vietnam, making it the largest empire the world has ever known. The Mongols improved the road system linking China with Russia and promoted trade throughout the empire and with Europe. Tens of thousands of horses were on standby to enable riders to cross the huge expanse of land with important messages at great speed.

In China, the Mongol Yuan dynasty instituted a famine relief scheme and expanded the canal system, which brought food from the countryside to the cities. It was the first to enforce paper money as the sole form of currency. This was the China that Marco Polo and other travellers visited and described in their journals to an amazed Europe. The grandeur of the Mongol empire in China lasted over a century. After Kublai Khan died in 1294, the Mongols became increasingly dependent on the people they ruled. They were deeply resented as an elite, privileged class exempt from taxation, and the empire became ridden with factions vying for power. The Mongols were expelled from Beijing by the first emperor of the Ming dynasty in the mid 14th century. The collapse of the Yuan dynasty caused over 60,000 Mongols to return to Mongolia. Their unity dissolved and frequent clan warfare and a long period of decline followed.

During the time of Mongolia's disarray, the Manchus, ancient enemies of the Mongols, established the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Despite their military prowess, the Manchus at first made no aggressive moves against Mongolia; they didn't need to - the Mongols were defeating themselves. The Zungar Mongols of the west were locked into a fierce military struggle with the Khalkha Mongols of the east. The Zungar seemed to be gaining the upper hand when the Khalkha made a fatal mistake. They invited the Manchu Qing emperor to send troops to fight their Zungar enemy. Like most Mongols, the Zungar warriors were highly skilled horseback archers. However, the Manchus possessed new technology which the Mongols couldn't combat - muskets and cannon. By 1732 the Zungar were resoundingly defeated and Mongolia came under the control of Manchu China. Manchu rule over China was competent and reasonably benign until around 1800; thereafter the Qing emperors became increasingly corrupt and despotic. In both China and Mongolia, peasants suffered ruthless exploitation, ruinous taxes and brutal punishment for the slightest offence: both were ripe for rebellion. In 1911 China's Qing dynasty crumbled. The Mongols quickly saw their opportunity and independence from China was declared on 1 December 1911, with a theocratic government under the leadership of the 8th Jebtzun Damba (Living Buddha). On 25 May 1915, the Treaty of Kyakhta, which granted Mongolia limited autonomy, was signed by Mongolia, China and Russia.

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 shocked Mongolia's aristocracy. Taking advantage of Russia's weakness, a Chinese warlord sent his troops into Mongolia in 1919 and occupied the capital. In early 1921, retreating White Russian anticommunist troops entered Mongolia and expelled the Chinese. The brutality of both the Chinese and Russian forces inflamed the Mongolians' desire for independence. As the Russian Bolsheviks were steadily advancing against the White Russian forces in Siberia, Mongolian nationalists asked the Bolsheviks for help. Together they recaptured Ulaan Baatar in July 1921. The country's Buddhist leader was retained as a figurehead and the newly formed Mongolian People's Party (the first political party in the country's history, and the only one for the next 69 years) took over the government.

On 26 November 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) was declared and Mongolia became the world's second communist country. Mongolian communism remained fairly independent of Moscow until Stalin gained absolute power in the late 1920s. Then the purges began. Stalin's stooge, Khorloogiyn Choibalsan, was selected to lead Mongolia. Following Stalin's lead, Choibalsan ordered the seizure of land and herds which were then redistributed to peasants. In 1932 more than 700 people, mostly monks, were imprisoned or murdered, their property seized and collectivized. Farmers were forced to join cooperatives and private business was banned, Chinese and other foreign traders were expelled, and all transport was nationalised.

The government's campaign against religion was particularly ruthless. In 1937 a reign of terror was launched against the monasteries in which thousands of monks were arrested and executed. It's believed that by 1939 some 27,000 people had been executed (3% of Mongolia's population at the time), 17,000 of whom were monks.

As the Soviet regime stagnated and faltered in the early 1980s, Mongolia came under the leadership of Jambyn Batmonkh, a decentraliser heartened by the Soviet reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev. Batmonkh instigated a cautious attempt at perestroika and glasnost (known as *il tod* in Mongolian) in 1986. By the late 1980s, relations with China even started to thaw and full diplomatic relations were established in 1989. The unravelling of the Soviet Union resulted in decolonisation by default. Few in Mongolia were ready for the speed of the collapse or prepared to seize the moment.

In March 1990, large pro-democracy protests erupted in the square in front of the parliament building in Ulaan Baatar and hunger strikes were held. Things then happened quickly: Batmonkh lost power; new political parties sprang up; and hunger strikes and protests continued. In May the government amended the constitution to permit multiparty elections in June 1990. Ironically, the communists won the elections. Although Ulaan Baatar residents gave much support to the opposition parties, rural areas voted overwhelmingly for the communists. The communist party announced it would share power with several young democrats. Freedom of speech, religion and assembly were all granted. Four years later, on 30 June 1996, the Mongolian Democratic Coalition unexpectedly trounced the ruling MPRP, ending 75 years of unbroken communist rule.

6.1 A Brief History of MONGOLIA

C3rd BC Hunnu Kingdom in Mongolia, chieftains include Tumen and Modun, who repelled an attack by the Han Chinese approximately 200BC.

1162 AD Chingis Khan ("Genghis Khan") born under the name Temujin.

1202 Genghis crowned as supreme Khan in Mongolia. In the following 25 years, he establishes a Kingdom stretching from Europe to the Pacific.

1227 Genghis dies. His sons inherit the Empire but squabble over it. Batu-Khan establishes a new base in Khan-Baliq (Beijing) and rules from there. Marco Polo joins as Special Envoy.

1336 Timu-Lenkh (Timurlane) born. Moves eastwards, and takes Samarkand as a rival Mongol Capital.

1377 Toktamish-Khan crushes the Russian army at he Battle of Kulikovo.

1388 Meantime Chinese attack Karakorum, the Mongolian Capital, and destroy it.

1390's Timur smashes Toktamish's army in attempts to take control of a Greater Mongolia.

1400's Timur takes Baghdad and Damascus

1405 Timur dies in Western Asia - 1406 Toktamish dies as Khan of the Golden Horde. Mongol Empire slides into chaos and demise, over-run by local enemies and subjugated peoples.

1635 Zanabasar, the greatest of Mongolian Artists and thinkers is born. During his life he reinvents the Mongolian alphabet, designs great temples, casts bronze statues and substantially advances Mongolian culture.

1691 Manchurian forces invade Mongolia and subjugate it. Mongolian language declared illegal. Mongolians forced into serfdom of their Manchu Masters for the following three centuries.

1911 Qing Dynasty rulers overthrown in Mongolia. 1915 - Kyakhta Agreement - Mongolia is recognised by China as independent on conditions that it doesn't attempt to form relations with foreign powers. Bogdo-Gegen is recognised as the Mongolian King.

1918 Bogdo-Gegen refused to recognise the Soviet Revolution, calls Chinese troops to aid Mongolia against the Soviet threat.

1921 Mongolian People's Party founded in Kyakhta, Sukhbatar receives orders to command its forces.

1924 The Mongolian Socialist Revolution - the Bogd Khan "disappears", a new Socialist Govt. is declared, with Sukhbatarat it's head. The USSR is invited to help protect the new fellow-socialist State - but soon Stalin had replaced all the Mongolian Revolutionaries with puppets of his own choosing. Sukhbatar dies in "mysterious circumstances"

1930's With the assistance of the NKVD (precursors of the KGB) all Buddhist worship in Mongolia is halted, thousands of monks massacred, and temples destroyed. The country is placed in the control of the notorious martial Choybalsan, Stalin's loyal puppet ruler.

1990 Fearing a repetition of the revolts in Eastern Europe the Mongolian Communist party voluntary announces reforms and re-invents itself . It is returned to power in highly suspect "free" elections.

1990's The reinvented Communist party continues to rule in Mongolia, but introduces substantial reforms, and a free market economy. A country population remains loyal to the former Communists in a second set of elections. Oppositions have success only in larger cities and remain out voted.

6.2 *The Genghis Khan Cult*

Mongolia is obsessed with Genghis Khan, having been denied the chance to celebrate their national hero under the Communist rule. There are hotels, shops, brands of vodka, and even car tires named after him.....

It almost happened by accident. A poor boy from a once proud family, Temujin, returned from hunting to find his mother kidnapped by a rival clan. Calling in an old family debt of honour, he raised a small band of armed men, freed his mother and killed the kidnappers. Next, he returned the favour by eliminating some rivals of his new allies, simultaneously developing and expanding his own influence. Other men joined him who were tired of the old infighting between the clans. Finally he was summoned to the Kuriltai-The mid summer meeting of clan elders where he was crowned their chief. "Know my name " he said..."I am Genghis Khan"

(In Mongolian the name is pronounced "Chingis Khan" and means "Rightful ruler"- by the popular mistranslation it is "ruler of the world" which is at least glamorous)

7 **Ulaanbaatar - Mongolia's Capital City**

7.1 *Ulaanbaatar - Mongolia's Capital City*

7.1.1 Location and Orientation

Ulaanbaatar is situated in central east Mongolia. The city spreads from east to west along a large wide valley. The main road through this valley is Enkh Taivny Orgon Choloo or Peace Avenue. The centre of the city is Sukhbaatar Square, from where all other distances are measured. Bogd Khan, Bayanzurkh, Chingeltei and Songino Khaikhan mountains surround the city. The Tuul river runs from east to west in the south of the city.

The city is divided into six districts and many sub districts and microdistricts. More and more street name signs are being erected although taxi drivers and the locals tend to use the names of the districts or identifiable buildings to find locations. Some tourist signposts have recently been erected to help visitors get around. Useful landmarks include museums, banks, Sukhbaatar Square, the larger hotels, hospitals and restaurants.

7.1.2 History

The first capital of the recent Mongolian Empire was called Urguu and was located some 420km from Ulaanbaatar. Situated in Arkhangai Aimag at the Da Khuree Monastery, it was the home to Zanabazar who had been proclaimed the head of Buddhism in Mongolia. The city moved several times along the Tuul, Orkhon and Selenge rivers.

Ulaanbaatar was built in its current location in 1778 and named the 'City of Felt'. It then became known as the Great Camp and was ruled under the Bogd Khaan. When Mongolia gained independence from China in 1911, the city became the capital of Outer Mongolia. It was invaded in 1918, again by China, and then three years later by the Russians. In 1924, the city was named Ulaanbaatar (Red Hero) and declared the official capital of Mongolia. In 1933, Ulaanbaatar became an autonomous region from Tov Aimag. The Russian influence for more than seventy years left Ulaanbaatar a relatively young and unattractive city. Many of the original buildings, including monasteries have been destroyed and replaced by Soviet-style apartment buildings.

7.1.3 Accommodation

There are now over 50 hotels in the capital, of varying standards. There are no official classification systems for these hotels at present, although it is hoped a grading system will be introduced soon. Prices range from around US\$15 - US\$360 for one night. The better standard hotels can be busy during peak season. For details of all hotels, [CLICK HERE](#). There are also a few small and cheap guest houses for the backpacker traveller. On the outskirts of the capital are a few ger camps which offer the more traditional style of accommodation. Hotel services vary, but many will offer to organise transfers, tours and business services.

7.1.4 Getting Around

Getting around the city is very easy, especially if you can explain where you want to go in Mongolian. There is a good network of both buses and trolley buses. Maps are available that show the routes and all the buses clearly display the route number. There is a standard charge of MNT 200 for buses and MNT 100 for trolley buses. Payment is made to the conductor, who usually wears a bright blue apron. The only difficulty is accepting how crowded they are. You may find yourself squeezed inside the bus so tightly that you'll miss your stop. Also, foreigners on buses are an attraction for pickpockets. Please ensure you take the utmost care with money, wallets and personal possessions. The buses and trolleybuses run from around 6am to 10pm everyday.

Since the buses are so crowded, a number of entrepreneurs have started their own services using minibuses. They usually ply the same routes as the buses and have route numbers displayed. The normal rate is similar to the buses.

Taxi services run all around the city, although it can be difficult to arrange travel in advance unless the driver has a mobile phone. Taxis are identified by taxi written on the cars. There also a number of bright yellow cars recently brought into the country that can be easily identified as taxis. Although some taxis have meters they are not often used and no pressure should be put on the driver to use it. The standard cost is MNT 280-300 per kilometre. Some drivers will try to charge more, especially if you appear to be a tourist. Agree the price in advance if you can.

Ulaanbaatar must be one of the only places in the world where you can stop almost any car for a lift. Potentially, every car in the capital is a taxi. If you hire a car and the driver is prepared to pick you up, he'll do so and charge the same rates as taxis (around MNT 300 per kilometre). This is seen to be a safe way of travelling, although it may not be appropriate if you are a single woman and travelling late at night.

7.1.5 Freight Forwarders

If you're intending to spend a fair amount of time in Mongolia or need to ship back any large souvenirs, there are a few freight forwarding companies that can help. Both train and plane services are available and prices vary. Each company should be able to help with giving costs and timeframes. Try the following:

7.1.6 Bookshops and Libraries

There are quite a large number of books now available in languages other than Mongolian, about the history, culture and environment. There are plans to open a bookshop specifically for these publications, but at present you will have to seek out what you want from various locations. The best places to try first are the Central Post Office, State Department Store and Juulchin Shop (rear of Bayangol Hotel).

Look for the following titles: 'Chinggis Khaan', 'My Mongolia', 'This is Mongolia' and a set of large books giving details of architecture, art, and history.

If you want some simple reading material, try Scrolls bookshop (near the Trade and Development Bank) for foreign language novels.

The two major libraries are the State Central Library (near the Bayangol Hotel) and the Natsagdorj Library (near the circus). Both have very little for anyone not able to read Russian and Mongolian.

There are two weekly English Language newspapers - The Mongol Messenger and The UB Post. Both are available from some newspaper stands and the Central Post Office.

7.1.7 Services

Telephone - Local, national and international telephone calls can be made from many hotels and also the Central Post Office. (See Fact pack for further information)

Post - There are over 20 post offices dotted around the city, but the most identifiable and perhaps most convenient is the Central Post Office on Sukhbaatar Square. The post office sells cards, postcards, stamps and envelopes. (See Fact Pack for details on prices)

Police - Call 102 (Click here for details of Police Registration in Mongolia)

Fire Brigade - Call 101

Ambulance - Call 103 (Click here for details of Hospitals)

7.1.8 Internet Cafes

Email and the Internet are now very popular with Mongolia's younger generation. There are several places around the capital now to send and receive your messages and surf the Net. Prices are charged by the hour and range between MNT 1800 and 10,000. Try the following:

Internet House Cafe, Youth Federation Building, Baga Toiruu. Tel: (976) 1 310317. Email: byambaa@mongol.net

I Cafe, Centre of Scientific and Technological Information (Soros Building). Tel: (976) 1 312061. Fax: (976) 1 320616. Email: icafe@magicnet.mn Open Monday to Friday 08.30-21.00 Saturday and Sunday 10.00-16.00

Internet Cafe, Khuvgalchidyn Orgon Choloo (next to Natural History Museum)

Epsilon Cyber Cafe, Baga Toiruu (opposite Trade and Development Bank)

UN Information Shop, 7 Erkhuu Street (near Chinese Embassy)

Internet and Information, City Centre Library, Seoul Street (near the circus) Tel: (976) 1 329840. Fax: (976) 1 320210.

Email: ubpic@magicnet.mn Open Monday to Friday 09.00-13.00 and 14.00-18.00

Internet Tov, Seoul Street (near the Red Rock nightclub) Tel: (976) 1 318485/318486. Fax: (976) 1 312307. Email:

bodicom@mongolnet.mn Website: www.mongolnet.mn Open Monday-Friday 09.00-19.00 Saturday 11.00-18.00

Infocom Centre, (behind Central Post Office). Open Monday to Friday 09.00-18.00 Saturday and Sunday 10.00-16.00

7.2 Banks and Money Changers in Ulaanbaatar

The facilities available for changing money, cashing travelers cheques, obtaining cash advances on credit cards and transferring money are limited, although available. The normal banking hours are 9.00 - 13.00 and 14.00 to 16.00 although there are variations. American Express Travelers Cheques are the most widely accepted along with VISA, MasterCard and

American Express Credit Cards. There are a few places other than banks that are able to change money, but visitors are advised to be careful of their money and possessions, visiting such places. Below are a small number of banks and money changers, located in the center of Ulaanbaatar.

BANK OF MONGOLIA, Khudaldaanii Gudamj - 6. telephone: (976) 1 322166. Fax: (976) 1 311471. Email: adm@mglbank.mn. Website: www.mglbank.mn. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00 - 13.00 and 14.00 to 18.00

GOLOMT BANK, Sukhbaatar Square. Telephone: (976) 1 311530/327812/311971, Fax: (976) 1 312307. Email: mail@golomtbank.com. Website: www.golomtbank.com. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00 - 16.00 Services Available: Cashing of Travelers Cheques, Changing Money and Cash Advances on Credit Cards.

ANOD BANK, Khudaldannii Gudamj. Telephone: (976) 1 312412. Fax: (976) 1 313070. Email: anod@magicnet.mn. Website: www.anod.mn. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00 - 13.00 and 14.00 - 17.00

SAVINGS BANK, Khudalmaa Street. Telephone: (976) 1 327467/311966/327329. Fax: (976) 1 310621/320057. Email: savbank@mongol.net. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00-13.00 and 14.00-18.00

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BANK, Khudalmaa Street. Telephone: (976) 1 312363. Fax: (976) 1 325449. Email: tdbmts@magicnet.mn. Website: www.mol.mn/tdbm. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00-12.30 and 14.00-15.30

ULAANBAATAR BANK, Baga Toiruu -15. Tel: (976) 1 312155. Fax: (976) 1 325017. Opening Days/Times: Monday to Friday 09.00-13.00 and 14.00-16.00

MONGOL POST BANK, Central Post Office. Tel: (976) 1 310993/310603. Fax: (976) 1 312351. Opening Times: Monday to Friday 09.00-13.00 and 14.00-18.00

INNOVATION BANK, Huvisgalchid Street 5-1. Tel: (976) 1 312531. Fax: (976) 1 310833. Email: innbk@magicnet.mn. Opening Times: 09.00-13.00 and 14.00-16.00

UYANGA - ERDENE CURRENCY EXCHANGE CENTRE, Ard Kino Theatre, Baga Toiruu Tel/Fax: (976) 1 320772
Opening Times: Daily 08.00-20.00

7.3 Shops & Shopping in Ulaanbaatar

Ulaanbaatar has a wide range of shops suitable for tourist purchases. Popular souvenirs include; carpets, books, traditional clothing, wood carvings, embroideries, leather products and

The Khan's Ger Baga Toiruu (next to the Youth Federation Building) **Tel:** (976) 1 328410 **Open:** Monday-Saturday 10.00-19.00 Mongolian antiques, cashmere products, national clothes, art works, paintings, felt products, souvenirs, posters, postcards, leather and fur goods. The shop also provides a calligraphy service. Have your name written in Mongolian script.

Fine Art Shop Peace Avenue (between Peace and Friendship House and Centre Point Shopping Centre) **Tel:** (976) 1 324234 **Open:** Monday-Saturday 10.30-20.00, Sunday 11.00-17.00 Mongolian traditional paintings, oil paintings, felt products, souvenirs and books.

Art & Antique Shop Amar's Street (attached to the Cultural Centre) **Tel:** (976) 1 324338 **Open:** Monday-Friday 10.00-20.00, Saturday 10.00-18.00, Sunday 10.00-15.00 Mongolian antiques (sold with export certificates), art works, traditional paintings, felt products, souvenirs, including ceramic, wood and stone carvings.

Luya Antique Shop Peace Avenue (inside St. Petersburg Centre) **Tel:** (976) 1 352452 **Open:** Daily 09.00-20.00 Variety of Mongolian antiques.

State Department Store Peace Avenue **Tel:** (976) 1 324311 **Open:** Monday-Friday 09.00-20.00, Saturday & Sunday 10.00-18.00 The biggest shop in town with a wide variety of souvenirs on the 4th floor. Also sells food, electrical goods, music, furniture, material, cosmetics.

Gobi Cashmere House Khuvsgalchid Avenue (next to Hanamasa Japanese Restaurant) **Tel:** (976) 1 313662 **Open:** Monday 13.00-18.00, Tuesday-Friday 10.00-18.00, Saturday 11.00-18.00 Cashmere clothes from Mongolia's largest cashmere producer.

Antique Shop Chinggis Avenue (inside Bayangol Hotel) **Tel:** (976) 1 329178 **Open:** Monday-Friday 10.00-14.00 & 15.00-19.00 Mongolian traditional paintings, oil paintings, national clothes, felt products, souvenirs and books.

Juulchin Shop Chinggis Avenue (rear of Bayangol Hotel) **Tel:** (976) 1 **Open:** Range of souvenirs including books, music, ornaments, cashmere products and traditional clothing. Also sells western food items.

Mercury, Dalai Eej and Passage Markets Seoul Street (near the circus) **Tel: Open:** Best place to shop for western and east Asian food stuffs. Clothes, meat, vegetables, bakery, fruit and packaged goods available. The variety is seasonal but new items keep appearing every week!

7.4 *Ulaanbaatar*

7.4.1 Welcome to Mongolia

Mongolia is a huge nation with a tiny population. Imagine a country larger than France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland combined, but with a population only 20% of London's population, and you get some idea. Mongolia's heyday was under its (in)famous medieval leader, Genghis Khan (properly called "Chinghis-Khan" in Mongolian). The country was over-run by its own satellite, China, in 1388, and became a heavily-subjugated province of China until 1924 - when a Socialist Revolution was declared, throwing-off Chinese control. However, when the Mongolians accepted the USSR's help in strengthening their borders against China, they simply exchanged one occupying power for another. By 1930, the original leaders of the 1924 Revolution were dead "in mysterious circumstances" and Stalin's puppet-rulers were in charge. Mongolia remained effectively a Soviet outpost until the USSR itself crumbled in 1990, and Mongolia regained genuine independence.

7.4.2 Ulaanbaatar

The Mongolian Royal Court, long called Urga, was not a static "city" - it was a mobile Assembly housed in the traditional Mongolian Felt Tents called Gers - although these were truly royal Gers of great size and splendour. Its movements were seasonal, as it progressed around the country. However, towards the 19th, it spent longer and longer periods near the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, the largest in Mongolia, and eventually became stationary there. However, the only stone buildings in the city were the Buddhist Monasteries - all the residents lived in Gers. For this reason, there is not the large collection of ancient architecture in Mongolian cities which you might expect in a European city of equal age and tradition (in fact, Mongolian tradition holds the earth in great respect, and there is a belief in leaving no trace of your having passed-by on its holy surface). It also suited the Chinese Manchu overlords to keep the Mongolians relatively poor and unsettled.

This tradition was rapidly overturned in the Revolution. The young Mongolian State wanted to join the industrialised world - and the USSR lost no time in building soviet-style buildings to assist its "socialist neighbour". Consequently, Ulaanbaatar today has a very definite "soviet" appearance. However, hiding behind the Stalin-Gothic, there are several things worth seeing - although 2-3 days is plenty in this small city of only 1/2M people:

- **Gandan Monastery** (the full name is Gandantegchinlen). The oldest and most prestigious Buddhist Monastery in Mongolia - on the edges of Ulaanbaatar. Numerous temples, a Great Temple, several stupa's etc
- **Choijin Monastery** Museum Complex. A stupendously-decorated Temple hidden in the heart of the city - now a Museum.
- **Residence of the Bogd-Khans**. The surprisingly modest former private home of the Priest-Kings of Mongolia - now displaying priestly regalia used in coronations etc.
- **Natural History Museum**. Ignore the awful, broken display-cases - the collection of Dinosaur finds from the Mongolian Gobi is worth the trip.

8 Legal stuff

8.1 *General Information for Tourists to Mongolia*

The information below should provide you with a knowledge of how you can best prepare for a visit and give you some idea of what to expect when you arrive.

Visas

Generally, everyone entering Mongolian territory must have a visa. However, because of bilateral agreements made with some countries, this is not always the case.

All types of visas can be obtained from the Visa and Passport Division of the Ministry of External Relations, in Ulaanbaatar, and also Mongolian Embassies, Consulates, Honorary Consulates, Trade and Permanent Missions abroad.

It is also possible to obtain 30-day tourist and 7-day transit visas at the entry points of Mongolia. Buyant Ukhair Airport in Ulaanbaatar, Zamyn Uud in Southern Mongolia and Sukhbaatar in the north of the country. You do not require a letter of invitation.

For all types of visa application, you will need your passport, a completed application form and at least one passport-size photograph. Passports should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months. The standard charge for a tourist visa is US\$25 and for a transit visa US\$15 if you obtain the visa in advance. If you require the visa urgently or if you obtain your visa at the border points, you will need to pay US\$50 and US\$30 respectively.

Visitors staying in Mongolia for more than 30 days must register with the State Police Department. For further information about registration, [CLICK HERE](#).

8.1.1 Customs

Every tourist will complete a customs declaration form on arrival, which must be retained by them until their departure. This allows the free import and export of articles for personal use during your stay. The contents of checked-in baggage must be declared on arrival if the total value of those contents exceed US\$1000 in value. The contents of checked-in baggage must be declared upon departure if the total value of those goods exceeds US\$500.

Items prohibited from import into/export from Mongolia

Items	Export / import
Opium, hashish and other narcotics and any apparatus used for their manufacture	Export / Import
Books, movies, videos, records, films or photos of a pornographic or violent nature	Export / Import
Animals, trophies and products, if listed in national and international Red Data Books as endangered species	Export
Goods donated to Mongolia by donor countries and international organizations	Export
Livestock, animals, birds, their raw materials, foetii, embryos and microorganisms without veterinary certification or permission from appropriate organizations	Export / Import

Items that require authorization for import/export

Items	Import/Export	Organizations giving permission
Historical and cultural items, paleontological , archeological findings, sample test of soil, plants and animals	Export / Import	Ministry of Enlightenment
Precious and semi -precious metal	Export	Ministry of Finance, Mongol Bank
Armaments, weapons and explosives	Export / Import	Ministry of Defense, General Police office, State Security Board
Plants registered in international and national Red Data Book of endangered species.	Export	Ministry of Nature & the Environment
Radioactive elements, chemicals and other radioactive sources	Export / Import	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
Pedigree animals	Export	Ministry of Agriculture and Industry
Blood and blood products, donor transplants	Export / Import	Ministry of Agriculture and Industry and Ministry of Health
Spirit	Import	Ministry of Agriculture and Industry
Alcoholic drinks apart from spirit	Import	Governor of provinces and capital city
Ores of rare earth elements	Export / Import	Ministry of Agriculture and Industry, Ministry of Enlightenment

Mongolia allows the following items to be brought in duty free:

- 1 Litre of Spirits
- 2 Litres of Wine
- 3 Litres of Beer
- 200 Cigarettes
- 250 Grams of Tobacco

The customs declaration forms asks the visitor to declare the amount and currencies of money being carried. Visitors are advised that if they fail to declare the amount of money they are carrying, the money can be confiscated by customs officials. Visitors taking antiques and fossils out of the country must have official documentation to do so. Some shops will provide the necessary documents upon purchase. Alternatively, permission can be obtained from the Ministry of Enlightenment in Ulaanbaatar.

8.1.2 Embassies

Mongolia has over 50 Embassies, Consulates, Permanent Missions, Trade Missions and Honorary Consulates. For full details including addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and email addresses, [CLICK HERE](#)

8.1.3 Climate

The Mongolian Climate is one of extremes - hot summers and freezing cold winters. Known as the 'Land of Blue Skies', it has over 260 sunny days each year. The winter is long and cold with temperatures often well below -30° Centigrade. Despite these temperatures, the blue winter sky makes it often feel warmer. There is very little snowfall but it and ice can remain for several weeks at a time. The rainy season is from July to September, but the showers are often brief. The summer is a very pleasant time because, although temperatures can reach +40° Centigrade, the air is very dry. The Gobi usually has the hottest temperatures. Summer evenings can be cool because of Mongolia's high altitude. The Spring is a time of strong winds, especially difficult in the sandy areas of the Gobi. For up-to-date details of the weather in Mongolia, visit www.wunderground.com/global/MO.html or specifically Ulaanbaatar, www.weather.com/cities/mg_ulan_bator.html or <http://cnn.com/WEATHER/html/UlaanBaatarMongolia.html>

8.1.4 Transport

Transport to or from Mongolia is usually by air or train. Flights are run all year by MIAT (Mongolian International Air Transport) to Berlin, Moscow, Beijing, Seoul and other Russian Towns. Aeroflot, Korean Air and Air China are also operating flights. In the summer months, flights may be running between Ulaanbaatar and Hong Kong, Singapore and Osaka. [For timetables, airline offices and other flight information, visit our Planes Page.](#)

The Trans-Mongolian Railway between Moscow and Beijing passes through Ulaanbaatar. Russian and Chinese trains make the full journey which takes around six days. [For timetables, costs, ticket outlets and further information, visit our trains page.](#) Transport within the capital city is by bus, trolley bus, taxi or private car. To enter into the vast Mongolian countryside limited bus and train services are available, although many tend to use private hire vehicles. For full details of travel within Mongolia, [CLICK HERE](#).

8.1.5 Language

The official language of Mongolia is Mongolian, although English is now beginning to be widely used by many residents of the capital. Mongol is the language of most of the population of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia and of separate groups living in other provinces of the People's Republic of China. The modern Mongol language developed after the Mongol People's Revolution of 1921 on the basis of the Khalkh dialect. The Cyrillic script was introduced in the 1940's and is now the alphabet used by most Mongolians. However, there have been several calls during the last ten democratic years for the traditional script to be reintroduced. There are a total of 35 letters in the Mongolian Cyrillic alphabet. There are many phrasebooks and dictionaries available in the capital now.

8.1.6 Food

Despite what you might hear about food supplies in Mongolia, it's now very simple to have a balanced diet, even if you're a vegetarian. If you're intending to eat out in Ulaanbaatar, there are a large number of restaurants serving quality, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Japanese, Italian, English, French, Russian, Latin American and of course Mongolian cuisines. [Click here to see our list of bars, restaurants and cafes in the capital.](#)

There are also a lot of supermarkets and markets selling both Mongolian and imported goods from China, Russia, East Asia and Europe. The domestic meat and dairy products are good value and considerably more tasty than meat you may find at home. The one used by most of the expatriates living in the country is the Mercury Market situated just a couple of hundred meters west of the Circus.

In the countryside things are a bit different. Although some of the larger Aimag centres will have supplies suitable for foreigners, the Sums will have little more than biscuits and chocolate. As you move out of the city, you also lose the quality in restaurant food. In most cases only Mongolian-style food will be available.

The extreme climate here means that many Mongolians, especially those living in the countryside have to eat a lot of protein and fat to keep themselves warm and healthy. Visiting herders in the countryside will inevitably mean that you will be offered a number of meat and dairy products. Even if some of them look unappetizing, you will please your host greatly if only you try a little. [See our section on culture to find etiquette tips for visiting nomads.](#)

8.1.7 Time Differences

Most of Mongolia is 8 hours ahead of GMT. However, the three western aimags of Khovd, Uvs and Bayan Ulgii are GMT+7. Mongolia no longer puts forward its clocks by 1 hour in the summer months.

8.1.8 When to go

Mongolia's tourism season is from May to October because of the difficult climate at other times of the year. Visiting out of season is not a problem as long as you can tolerate cold weather, dust storms and difficulties in traveling. If you want to see the Naadam Festival, you'll need to come in July. However, July and August are the two wettest months of the year. The best time to visit the Gobi is June or September as temperatures aren't so hot then.

8.1.9 Activities

A number of activities are available to both independent travellers and groups. Among the most popular are horse riding, camel trekking, fishing, bird watching, hiking, mountaineering, rafting and hunting. For further details of the activities available and suggestions on the best locations, [CLICK HERE](#)

8.1.10 What to take

What you need to bring depends on where you'll go when you travel, what activities you'll be undertaking, whether you're an independent traveller and what accommodation you'll be using. Here are a list of suggestions:

Passport, US\$ cash, money belt, Sleeping bag, tent, petrol stove, daypack, camera and batteries, torch and batteries, water bottle, warm clothing, wet weather clothing, sunglasses, first aid kit, small gifts for nomadic families.

8.1.11 Maps

Obtaining maps of Mongolia abroad can be very difficult. There are a few large scale maps around but for more detail, try searching out airline maps. On arrival in Mongolia, a greater range can be found, including tourism, road, geographical and ecological maps. The best place to buy them is at the 'Map Centre' near Elba Centre Electronics Shops and Gandan Monastery.

8.1.12 Tipping/Bargaining

Tipping - Tipping in restaurants, bars and cafes is not expected although, as more and more tourists are providing tips, the staff are of course very appreciative. Most places will charge a 13% sales tax on top of their menu prices so be aware of this. If you wish to leave a tip, 10% of your total order is a very reasonable amount.

Bargaining - The only place to think about bargaining now is at the black market. Most of the shops and markets in town have fixed prices which are often displayed on the goods. Do not try to bargain here. At the black market, tourists are unlikely to be charged very much more than the locals, unless they are buying antiques, jewellery and other cultural items. By all means try and get a price down but be reasonable. For example, as a guide, don't try for less than 60-70% of the asking price. And only start bargaining if you're seriously interested in buying the item.

8.1.13 Dangers/Annoyances

Mongolia is a safe place to be. As a visitor you are unlikely to experience any serious problems. However, like anywhere else there are a few things that visitors should be aware of, things that will need extra care and attention.

Foreign visitors are targets for a very small minority of thieves. Theft is seldom violent. Pick pocketing and bag slitting is most common in crowded places such as the black market, on buses or at tourist attractions such as Gandan Monastery. Valuables should be kept in a money belt and kept underneath your clothing. Be careful about being seen with large amounts of money outside.

Being out late at night is not advisable, especially if you are alone. Avoid ger districts and other poorly lit areas. Take a torch with you. Use a proper taxi if you can find one.

Vodka may be a popular drink in Mongolia which used in many celebrations, but it is also the source of a big alcohol problem. The problems are more serious in Ulaanbaatar and the aimag centres than in the countryside. Drunks tend to be more of an annoyance than a danger. Drunks are easily recognised by a stumbling walk. They tend to be on their own rather than in large groups. If you are approached by a drunk, try to walk away. If they follow, try running - they're unlikely to catch up with you if they've had a lot to drink. If you can find a policeman, all the better. Experience has shown that they are very tough on drunks annoying or threatening foreigners, although the immediate punishment may be something you're not used to.

Dogs, both stray and domestic should be avoided. Many are vicious and some are rabid. This is the case whether you're in a ger district in the city or at a ger in the middle of the countryside.

When it comes to getting train tickets, getting on a bus, walking through a market or entering shops, don't be surprised if you suddenly find an elbow in your side or a kick in the shin. It's not personal. It's the Mongolian Scramble. Go anywhere where there's a lot of people and you'll find out about it. Being polite won't get you very far - nor will getting angry. In Mongolia, do as the Mongolian's do. But don't get carried away!!

Power cuts and water shortages used to be common - but now very infrequent. Beggars are beginning to be more and more of a problem. No matter what your opinions are about begging, the increase is due to the number of tourists giving cash to children. If you wish to donate some money, find out about projects that are supporting the city's street children and put a donation to the best possible use.

8.1.14 Shops & Shopping

Most of Mongolia's economy is based on natural products. Hand woven carpets, leather clothing and articles, woolen clothing, furs, cashmere, camel hair products, Mongolian oil and water paintings, and wooden toys, puzzles and games.

There are a number of souvenir shops. The most popular items are paintings, antiques, handicrafts, carpets, books, cashmere, traditional Mongolian clothing, leather goods, wall hangings, puzzles, postcards, snuff bottles and wood carvings.

The food markets are well stocked on Mongolia, Russian, East and West European products although they may be a little more expensive than you expect. Many of the shops throughout Mongolia are in fact small kiosks within larger shops. You will find that many shops sell the same things so you'll have to look hard to find exactly what you want. Along the streets of Ulaanbaatar you will find many 'Tuuts', small kiosks that sell snacks and general provisions.

The most adventurous traveler may wish to go out to the infamous . black market. , which is a giant flea market on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. Almost anything can be bought at this market, which is always very crowded. Visitors should be aware however that pickpockets are a problem here and therefore care should be taken with wallets and purses.

For more information on shops to visit in Ulaanbaatar, [CLICK HERE](#).

8.1.15 Currency

The Mongolian currency is the Tugrug (T or MNT) which is available in denominations of 1, 3, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1000, 5000 & 10,000 Tugrug Notes. Coins are beginning to become into circulation and are in denominations of MNT 20, 50, 100 and 200. All notes carry the face of Chinggis Khan or Sukhbaatar on them and because of their age, can often look alike. The exchange rate is constantly changing. The rate as of 11th January 2000 is US\$1 = MNT1077. For an up-to-date exchange rate visit www.oanda.com/converter/classic

8.1.16 Banks

Most banks and the larger hotels in Ulaanbaatar will be able to change the major currencies, although US Dollars are the most widely accepted. It is also possible to change travellers cheques and get cash advances on your credit card. American Express, VISA and Mastercard are the most widely accepted. [See our full list of shops and retail outlets accepting credit cards.](#) In the Aimag centres, you'll certainly find at least one bank, but they will not be able to accept credit cards or traveller's cheques. They may be able to change US Dollars but the exchange rate will be a lot lower than that available in the capital.

In Ulaanbaatar, one of the most centrally located banks for both traveller's cheque cashing and credit card advances is the Trade and Development Bank. [See our full list of banks and money changers in Ulaanbaatar for more details.](#)

If you have US dollars in cash, you can get better rates of exchange from the licensed money changers. A number of different currencies can be exchanged.

8.1.17 Public Holidays in 2000

New Year's Day - 1st January

Tsagaan Tsar - 6th February

Mothers' and Children's Day - 1st June

Naadam - 11th to 13th July

Independence Day - 26th November

and in 2001 - New Year's Day - 1st January, Tsagaan Tsar - 24th January, Mothers' and Children's Day - 1st June, Naadam - 11th to 13th July, Independence Day - 26th November.

8.1.18 Tourism Information

There is at present no government tourist information centre to provide unbiased services to tourists. A number of hotels and tour operators may assist you but will obviously want you to stay in their hotels or undertake their tours. The Mongolian National Tourism Centre, the government's tourism policy implementation and promotion agency will be able to assist in emergencies but at present cannot cope with too many general enquiries. They can be contacted by telephone on (976) 1 311102 or emailed at ntc@mongol.net. Mongolia also does not currently have dedicated tourism offices abroad. Overseas embassies may be able to assist you.

8.1.19 Photography

Mongolia must be one of the most photogenic countries in the world. The landscapes, wildlife, culture and people create a wealth of opportunities. Films and camera batteries are available in the capital for most types of cameras. However, you are

advised to bring some supplies with you just in case. Photo processing can also be done in Ulaanbaatar but the quality is often lacking. Slide film is very difficult to obtain.

Photography is not allowed in monasteries or temples. Exceptions are made on rare occasions and only with the permission of the Lamas. Please respect the decisions of the staff at the Monastery or Temple. In some museums, you may have to pay an extra fee to use a still or video camera. A regulation exists that states that tourists should pay to take photographs within Mongolia's protected areas. However, it is often not enforced. Care should be taken in some places, i.e. photographing military establishments, border crossings and government buildings.

8.1.20 Accommodation

The standards of accommodation vary widely between Ulaanbaatar and the countryside. There are now a large number of hotels, guest houses and dormitories within the capital with prices between US\$5 and US\$120. The quality of the facilities, services and food generally increases in price. [Click here for a contact list of all Ulaanbaatar Hotels.](#)

In the countryside, there are a few hotels of generally a poorer standard in the Aimag centres, although most tourists will stay in specially constructed ger camps. These camps provide accommodation in the round felt houses used by nomads and usually have separate toilet, washing and restaurant facilities. Prices are around US\$30-40 per night.

Tourists can camp virtually where they like although they are advised to stay away from settlements. Laws also prohibit camping within certain zones of protected areas.

8.1.21 Medical Information

For detailed medical information, visitors to Mongolia should consult their doctors or refer to specialist information from the Internet.

Some milk is unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, see the Health appendix.

Diarrhoeal diseases and outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis occur. There is some risk of plague. Immunisation against hepatitis A is recommended. Hepatitis B is highly endemic.

There are almost 23,000 hospital beds and over 5000 doctors in Mongolia. However, health care facilities available to foreigners are limited. All Mongolian hospitals are very short of most medical supplies, including basic care items, drugs and spare parts for medical equipment. Reciprocal agreements with the UK or USA are not available and US medical insurance is apparently not valid in Mongolia. Doctors and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services. Visitors are urged to have health insurance including cover for evacuation to Hong Kong and to take with them any regular medication. Emergency care is available at the Russian Hospital, although a translator is essential.

8.1.22 Water Quality

Many visitors to Mongolia have drunk the tap and well water without boiling or treating it first. They have been lucky. Tourists are advised to buy mineral water or at least boil their water before using it. Giardia and other water-borne diseases can easily be picked up. Mineral water is in good supply in the capital and many of the Aimag centres.

8.1.23 Electricity

The power supply in Ulaanbaatar is now very reliable and there are only the occasional black-outs. Electricity is 220V, 50Hz. The sockets throughout the country accommodate the European-style 2-pin plugs. In the countryside, the power supply still has frequent interruptions. In many cases this is due to the cost of fuel. Wiring in many places needs updating and so care should be undertaken.

8.1.24 Telephones

The Mongolian telephone system is in the process of being modernised but still lacks many of the services we rely on elsewhere. Dialing Mongolia is relatively simple although may take several attempts. Mongolia's national code is '976'. Making international telephone calls from Ulaanbaatar is relatively easy. Most hotels have International Direct Dial Facilities. Alternatively, calls can be made from various telephone exchanges around the city. The 'Central Post' Building located on the southwest corner of Sukhbaatar Square is the largest telephone exchange.

International Call Charges (from communication offices)

Country	Direct Dial (1st Minute)	Operator Assistance (1st Minute)	Each Subsequent Minute
Russia,	US\$ 1.40	US\$2.80	US\$1.40
China, Kazakhstan	US\$ 1.80	US\$ 3.60	US\$ 1.80
Former Soviet Union,	US\$ 2.40	US\$4.80	US\$2.40
USA, Canada, Japan, Hong	US\$ 1.90	US\$ 3.80	US\$ 1.90

Kong, South Korea, Great Britain, Singapore			
Europe, Continental America, Africa, Far East	US\$ 2.80	US\$ 5.60	US\$2.80

Cheaper calls are available if calling from other telephones in the city, i.e. offices & hotels, especially between 22.00 and 07.00 weekdays, 17.00 and 07.00 Saturdays and all day Sunday.

Domestic Calls also have the same discount rates available. Calls are charged according to distance from Ulaanbaatar and range from MNT 174 to MNT 261 per minute. Calls within the city are around MNT 5 per minute.

The large telephone exchange on Sukhbaatar Square has the facilities for you to send faxes and emails. The cost for faxing depends on where the fax is being sent to. As a guide, a fax taking one minute to the United Kingdom would cost approximately MNT 3000.

8.1.25 Postal Services

Letters and parcels posted abroad can take anything from ten days to a few months to arrive at their destination, but they do usually arrive. The current rates are relatively expensive; postcards MNT 400, letters under 20 grams MNT 550. Registered mail starts at MNT 950. Parcel rates range from around US\$14 to US\$27, for a 1Kg parcel, depending on the destination. An express mail service is available for a limited number of countries. Prices to send a 1Kg package range from US\$25 to US\$40 depending on the destination. The central post office in Ulaanbaatar has a good range of postcards available. Stamp collectors will be surprised at the range of stamps available.

8.2 *Police Registration Information for Visitors*

These guidelines have been produced to assist visitors to Mongolia with information about registering with the Police upon arrival.

8.2.1 Who should register?

All visitors spending more than 30 days in Mongolia must register with the police department unless they are on an official visit..

Those people visiting Mongolia for 30 days or less are deemed as registered when they pass through immigration and therefore have no action to take as long as they do not stay longer in the country.

Visitors with a visa for more than 30 days or just an entry visa must register within 10 days of arrival in Mongolia.

Those people, who enter on a visa for less than 30 days but wish to stay longer than 30 days, must register themselves between the 30th and 40th day of being in the country.

8.2.2 How do I register?

To register, visitors must visit the third floor of the State Centre for Civil Registration and Information on Tsagdaagin Gudamj (police street).

The process of registration depends on the purpose of stay in Mongolia.

- Work . submit passport and official letter from employer
- Tourist . submit passport and official letter from tour operator / company
- Independent . submit passport, passport photo, required fee, and fill in application form.

A visitor's first registration must be made at the State Centre in Ulaanbaatar. In the future it may be possible to obtain subsequent registrations at the police departments in Sum and Aimag centres.

8.2.3 Going to be in the countryside?

Visitors who will be living or staying outside of the capital, Ulaanbaatar, for more than 7 days in one place, must obtain supplementary permission before departing. The required permission letter is also available from the State Centre, free of charge. When a visitor then goes to the countryside, they must register with the Aimag and Sum police departments on entry and exit from that location. Visitors who intend to visit many countryside locations, each for more than 7 days, can obtain a permission letter that can be used for all Aimag. Registration should still take place upon commencement and end of the stay by obtaining police stamps. Occasional visits to Ulaanbaatar by people registered in the countryside do not require informing the local police department.

8.2.4 How much does registration cost?

Police registrations are valid for as long as the visitor's visa is valid, up to a maximum of one year. The initial charge is MNT 25,000 and renewal charge MNT 12,000 for one-year registration. Tourist registrations are around 5,000 T for a 30-day period. Failure to register with the police will result in a fine of between MNT 30,000 and MNT 60,000, and MNT 2,000 per day unregistered.

8.2.5 Notes

If a passport expires during a visitor's stay, then a new registration must be applied for.

Visitors to Mongolia should carry their passport with them at all times. Photocopies of passports are not officially deemed sufficient although some police departments will accept them. An alternative to a passport for identification purposes is an official ID card issued by an employer (written in Mongolian)

If stopped by a police officer, they should show you identification and then explain why they have stopped you. All police officers should have card identification with them.

Complaints against the police can be made to the Chairman of Police at the nearest police department. If a response is unsatisfactory, a visitor can involve the courts.

If a foreign visitor is arrested and taken to a police station, the visitor is entitled to make a telephone call. The police must, through the Ministry of External Relations, contact the visitor's representative Embassy within 24 hours of the arrest.

8.3 *Visa Information*

These guidelines have been produced to clarify the current situation regarding the application for and use of Mongolian Visas for foreign citizens wishing to enter Mongolian territory.

8.3.1 Who needs visas?

Generally, everyone entering Mongolian territory must have a visa. However, because of bilateral agreements made with some countries, this is not always the case.

The following is a list of countries and regions with non-visa requirements for all kinds of passport holders:

- Malaysia – for up to 30 days
- Singapore – for up to 14 days
- Philippines – for up to 21 days
- Poland – for up to 90 days (ordinary passport holders must have letter of invitation)
- Israel – for up to 30 days
- Kazakhstan – for up to 90 days
- Cuba – for up to 30 days
- Hong Kong – for up to 14 days (ID cards are accepted to indicate residence in Hong Kong)
- Laos – for up to 90 days (although private visits need a visa)
- Vietnam – no time limit (although private visits need an official invitation)
- DPRK – for up to 30 days (although private visits need a visa)
- Former Yugoslavia – for up to 90 days (although passports must have the consular mark indicating the reason for travel)

The following is a list of countries with non-visa requirements for diplomatic and official passport holders:

- Russia – for up to 90 days
- Thailand – for up to 30 days
- Hungary – for up to 30 days
- Czech Republic – for up to 90 days
- Slovak Republic – for up to 90 days
- Bulgaria – no time limit
- Romania – no time limit
- Turkey – for up to 30 days

The following is a list of countries with a non-visa fee agreement:

- India – All types of passport require a visa although no visa applications, photographs or fees are required

8.3.2 Where can visas be obtained?

All types of visas can be obtained from the Visa and Passport Division of the Ministry of External Relations, in Ulaanbaatar, and also Mongolian Embassies, Consulates, Honorary Consulates, Trade and Permanent Missions abroad. If you do not have

any Mongolian representation in your country then you should contact your nearest or neighbouring representative. You do not have to go to the representative in your home country to get a visa.

It is also possible to obtain 30-day tourist and 7-day transit visas at the entry points of Mongolia – Buyant Ukhua Airport in Ulaanbaatar, Zamyn Uud in Southern Mongolia and Sukhbaatar in the north of the country. However, you must be arriving by aeroplane or train to be able to do this. You do not require a letter of invitation.

If a visitor is arriving at Buyant Ukhua Airport for official reasons, they may be able to obtain a visa without a letter of invitation, but they are advised to either bring a letter of invitation with them or obtain a visa in advance from a Mongolian representative in the country of departure.

It is also possible to obtain a visa for longer than 30 days at the three border points, although visitors will need a letter of invitation to be able to do this.

Please note that any letters of invitation should bear an official stamp from the company from which the letter is sent. Return tickets or onward visas are not required to obtain a visa.

8.3.3 What do I need to apply for a visa?

For all types of visa application, you will need your passport, a completed application form and at least one passport-size photograph. Passports should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months. The standard charge for a tourist visa is US\$25 and for a transit visa US\$15 if you obtain the visa in advance. If you require the visa urgently or if you obtain your visa at the border points, you will need to pay US\$50 and US\$30 respectively. If you are applying for a visa (other than tourist or transit) you will also require a letter from a Mongolian company, organization or government department explaining the reason why you wish to enter Mongolia.

8.3.4 How long can I stay in Mongolia?

30-day tourist visas can be extended by a further 30 days, but only once. The maximum length of stay for a person with a tourist visa is 60 days. A renewal must be requested more than 3 days prior to the current visa expiring. The visa renewal process is the same no matter which country you originate from. To renew a 30-day visa, you will need a letter explaining your reasons to prolong your stay. This letter can be written by tour operators, hotels, district governors or organizations.

If your visa is nearing expiry and cannot be renewed, but you wish to remain in Mongolia, you will have to leave the country and reapply for another visa.

It is possible to change from a tourist visa to another form of visa if you find employment here. To do this you will need to get the necessary documents from your employer.

There are penalties if you do not renew your visa yet remain in the country. If a visitor stays longer than their visa allows but goes to the Visa and Passport Division to report this, then they will be charged US\$15 for the first seven days and US\$2 for every day from 8 days onwards.

If a visitor tries to leave the country with an expired visa, they will be prohibited from doing so. They will have to visit the Visa and Passport Division to obtain permission. There is a fine of 30,000 T (c. US\$30) and then 2,000 T (c. US\$2) per day that they are over their visa.

8.3.5 Do I need to register with the Police?

Any person remaining in the country for more than 30 days must register themselves with the police. This can be done in Ulaanbaatar and also Aimag Centres. If you enter Mongolia on a 30-day visa then police registration is not necessary. If you renew your visa then you must register with the police at least three days prior to your current visa expiring. Anyone entering the country with a visa valid for more than 30 days must register with the police within 7 days of arriving in Mongolia.

Registration with the police only needs to be made once during a person's stay in Mongolia.

There are penalties if you do not register with the Police in the required timeframes.

8.3.6 What visa classifications are available in Mongolia?

- Diplomat 'D'
- International Organisations 'OY'
- Foreign Organisations / Joint Ventures 'T'
- Official 'A'
- Study 'S'
- Private 'H'
- Tourist 'J'
- To make contracts 'HG'
- Immigration 'TS'
- Business 'B'
- Non-Governmental Organisations 'O'

8.3.7 What visa types are available?

Tourists, will either obtain a single entry/exit visa or transit visa, depending on their visit to Mongolia. If they are simply crossing the territory by car or by train then they will need a transit visa. If they intend to stop anywhere on route then they will need a tourist visa. Transit visas are valid for 7 days although they can be extended.

Multiple entry/exit visas are available for persons who work for foreign embassies or organizations, who have joint ventures in Mongolia or who are contracted to work in Mongolia. The current price for this visa is US\$ 130 for one year and US\$ 65 for 6 months.

8.3.8 Can I enter and leave Mongolia by foot, horse, car or motorcycle?

The simple answer to this is yes, although tourists are not advised to undertake such a journey without further research. Entry and exit points are at Zamyn Uud in the south of the country and Altanbulag in the north.

If you enter on foot, you will be able to obtain a tourist or transit visa at the border. You will need your passport and a passport-size photograph to enable you to do this. You will not require a letter of invitation. However, because so few people choose to use this route to enter Mongolia, you are advised to get a visa and letter of invitation in advance. Special conditions apply to Russian and Chinese citizens.

If visitors wish to cross the borders by horse, car, motorcycle or other means, they will need to obtain permission for their mode of transport in advance. They will need to write to the Visa and Passport Division of the Ministry of External Relations in Ulaanbaatar.

8.3.9 Leaving Mongolia

Visitors wishing to leave Mongolia must obtain onward visas before doing so. For example, you will not be able to leave the country by train through Moscow, unless you have obtained a Russian visa. The same applies for all modes of transport and all border points.

8.4 Foreign Embassies in Mongolia

8.4.1 Czech Republic

Olympic Street -14, Sukhbaatar District, PO Box 665, Ulaanbaatar 13

Ambassador - Jaroslav Kamas

(976) 1 321886

(976) 1 323791

czechemb@magicnet.mn

9 České a slovenské stránky

9.1 Z Olomouce do Vladivostoku na kole - Mongolsko

9.1.1 ROZHODOVÁNÍ

V zimě nakupuji mapy a stále nejsem rozhodnutý kam jet. Na východ nebo na západ? Moje nerozhodnost něco stojí, nakoupil jsem mapy na obě strany a vím, že jedny zůstanou určitě doma. Trasu západním směrem jsem si představoval na kole do Norska, pak lodí na Island, ten objet, a zpět potom přes Velkou Británii a západní Evropu domů podle chuti a peněz. Protože se ale moje finanční situace nevyvíjela přes zimu nejlépe, nastal na jaře obrat o 180 stupňů. Rozhodl jsem se proto jet na východ. A což takhle od nás z Olomouce až do Vladivostoku? Obvolal jsem ambasády Ukrajiny, Ruska, Běloruska, Kazachstánu, Mongolska a Číny. Vízum je potřeba do Mongolska a do Číny. Do Mongolska jsem ho dostal bez problémů, do Číny nikoli. Učinil jsem totiž chybu. Na otázku, jak se tam chci dopravit, jsem bezelstně odpověděl, že na kole. Úřednice za okýnkem odpověděla něco v tom smyslu jako: „Tůdle!“ a nedala. Uvidím, zkusím to cestou.

Přes Slovensko, Ukrajinu, Rusko, Kazachstán a znovu Rusko jsem po dvou měsících a více než 7 tisících kilometrech v sedle bicyklu stanul na rusko-mongolské hranici v městečku Tašanta. Vstup do Mongolska však nebyl tak jednoduchý.

9.1.2 MONGOLSKO JSEM SI VYHÁDAL

Na celnici stojí pár aut. Jdu dopředu k závoře. Voják se zlatým zubem na druhé straně závory nevypadá sympaticky. Ptá se, odkud jsem. Čechy nezná, ale Československo ano.

„Otoč se a jed' zpátky, tady neprojdeš,“ vysvětluje mi, že zdejší přechod je pouze pro občany Ruska a Mongolska a občané třetích zemí musí použít přechod v Naušky, což je asi o tři tisíce kilometrů dál. Ptám se, kdo může vydat povolení pro cizince. Zlatozub odpovídá:

„Nikdo, jed' zpátky.“

Nechávám si zavolat staršího směny. U toho jsem pořídil stejně. Chci hovořit s náčelníkem.

Náčelník spí, potom prý odpočívá a pro mě není.

„Náčelník ti nepomůže, odjed,“ hlásí zlatozub už po několikáté. Já zůstávám a moje neposlušnost a stálé dotazy na náčelníka zlatozuba přivádějí k zuřivosti. Vedle celnice snad o 100 metrů blíž k hranici teče potok. Jdu pro vodu, jsem v půli cesty a zlatozub mě zmerčil. Začal řvát jak pominutý, ať se okamžitě vrátím. U závory na sebe chvíli řveme. Nemá to smysl, na adresu pohraničnicka si ulevuju česky a už neprovokuju, jen se každou hodinu slušně ptám na náčelníka.

Mám po náladě, musím hlídat kolo před děckama a s Mongolama nadáváme na ruskou byrokracii. Rusové odbaví jedno auto za hodinu i dýl a někteří čekají na odbavení už druhý den. Celnice je otevřena pouze přes den. Těsně před zavírací dobou můžu jít pohovořit s náčelníkem. Povolení může dát pouze velitelství pohraničnicků v Moskvě a požádat ho musí naše velvyslanectví.

Informace ne příliš povzbudivá, ale aspoň nějaká. Telefon tu není, tak putuji zase 50 kilometrů zpět do Koš Agač. Setmělo se, nocuju ve stepi a ráno přijíždím za známými, kteří mě včera nechali u sebe přespat. Na telefon mám čas, rozdíl od Moskvy je tři hodiny. Vybaven informacemi jdu na okresní úřad, vojenskou posádku, do banky a na poštu. Na úřadě a u vojáků jsem nevyřídil nic, v bance dolary nemění a na poště jsem zjistil, že volat do Moskvy přijde na víc než volat domů. Přesto v poledne volám na naši ambasádu. Sekretářce na konzulárním oddělení jsem nahlásil problém a žádám o pomoc. Při dalším telefonátu za dvě hodiny hovořím s konzulem panem Višňovským. Všechno zjistil, napsal a odfaxoval žádost na příslušná místa. Upozorňuje mě, že žádost může a nemusí být kladně vyřízena, a to v termínu, který nedokáže odhadnout.

Nemám kam spěchat. Pokud povolení nedostanu, můžu se vrátit domů. Za 14 dní, které mohu ještě v Rusku být, to na přechod v Naušky nestihnu a vízum do Mongolska by taky propadlo.

Vracím se ke známým a zapojuji se do pracovního procesu. Budují si malou prodejnu. Místnost obkládáme sololitem, vyrábí se pulty a police. Makáme do noci. Spí se u babičky a ráno zas do práce.

Dvakrát denně volám Moskvu a pořád nic. Je to na dobré cestě, ale stále chybí podpis generála, kterého není možno zastihnout. Třetí den odpoledne podepsal.

Prodejna je hotová, já sbalený, večer jsme popili, všichni odjíždějí a poslední noc jsem u babičky sám.

V neděli ráno opět do Tašantu. Na hranici o mně vědí a ještě vtipkují:

„Kde jsi, čekali jsme tě včera.“

Nikdo nespěchá, za dvě hodiny jsem odbaven a můžu dál.

Za Tašantou skončila náhorní rovina a nyní jedu údolím do 3 000 metrů vysokého sedla Durbaj Daba. Dvacet kilometrů do kopce a jsem tam. Zde probíhá fyzická hranice a je tu ještě ruská kontrola. Vojáček se dívá, pamatuje si, jak jsem se hádal před čtyřmi dny se zlatozubem, kontroluje pas a pouští mě do Mongolska. Hádky na hranici mě proslavila. Ještě možná po tisíci kilometrech v Mongolsku u mě zastavil gaz a první, co řidič připomněl, byla hádka na hranici.

9.1.3 NEČEKANĚ STUDENÉ POČASÍ

Jedu kousek dolů pod sedlo. Je tu mongolská celnice a několik jurty. Jsem předveden k náčelníkovi. Nastává obdobný problém jako v Rusku, ale přístup zcela jiný. Můj vstup musí povolit v Ulánbátaru. Náčelník vše zařídí, ale dnes je neděle odpoledne, tak až zítra.

„Stan si postav, kde chceš, voda je támhle a zítra uvidíme.“

V poledne můžu pokračovat v jízdě. Moje představa o Mongolsku byla sucho a vedro. Skutečností je, že prší, je zima a chvílemi sněží.

Vesnice Saganur a první problémy s orientací. Směrovky a ukazatele tu nejsou (nepotkal jsem je nikde v Mongolsku) a navíc tu nejsou ani cesty. Zatím jsem v horách, a tak je jen důležité trefit se do správného údolí. Lesy a stromy tu taky chybí. Spávat musím v otevřené krajině a já jsem radší, můžu-li se někdy na noc zašít.

Olgij - první město.

V každé nové zemi potřebuju několik dní na aklimatizaci. Musím zjistit, co kolik stojí, co si můžu dovolit a co ne. Jdu se podívat na trh, nic nekupuju a na všechno hledím, stejně jako trhovci na mě. Zásoby mám ještě z Ruska.

9.1.4 KRÁSNÁ PŘÍRODA, HROZNÉ CESTY

Tak dnes už to bylo Mongolsko, jak jsem si ho představoval. Slunce, hory, jurty, stáda dobytka, pastevci na koních a sem tam auto (pouze terénní gazy, zily a motorky). Ale také jak jsem si ho nepředstavoval. Necesty předčily i moje nejhorší očekávání. V horách kamenité vyjeté koleje, ve kterých by se ortodoxní crossový biker neuznávající asfalt cítil jistě skvěle. Mně ovšem nevyhovují.

A ještě jeden problém. Třetí den mám, já tomu říkám jinak, ale napíšu - úporný průjem. Tělo už nemá energii, jedu jak lemra, před polednem se mi motá palice a pamatuju dny, kdy jsem se cítil líp. Sedím dvě hodiny pod skálou ve stínu. Odpočinek nepomohl, tak sjíždím dolů k jezeru, v poledne lezu do stanu a spím až do rána.

Doma na dotazy, jak trénuju na tuto cestu, jsem ukazoval na vyboulené břicho a hrdě jsem hlásil, že jsem za zimu „natrénoval“ plus 15 kg. Za dva měsíce v Rusku se tukové zásoby přeměnily v tisíce kilometrů a zbytek těžce (ale příjemně) nabytých kilogramů padl nyní za oběť střevním potížím.

Ráno se cítím lépe, odjíždím od jezera a zkusím, jaké povahy jsou zdejší lidé. Západ Mongolska až po město Hovd je osídlen téměř výhradně Kazachy. Po dvaceti kilometrech vidím jurty a zastavuji u vesnice Tolbo. Tlačím kolo k jurtě a snažím se navázat hovor. Jsem pozván dovnitř, usazen na čestné místo, které je proti vchodu, a pohoštěn. Mléko, smetana, sýry, smažený chléb, kumys, čaj.

Další den jedu téměř stále z kopce a večer opouštím velké hory. Krajina se mění ve step. Problém nastává s jídlem. V Olgiju jsem nenakoupil a došlo. Potraviny lze koupit jen ve městech. Do Hovdu zbývá snad 50 km, tak musím do zítřka vydržet.

9.1.5 KOMÁŘI PŘIVÁDĚJÍ K ŠÍLENSTVÍ

V Hovdu kupuju zásoby potravin. Další město na trase Gobi Altaj je o 500 km dál. Za městem na kopci se v dálce objevilo obrovské jezero a začaly další nesnáze. Je už k večeru a objevují se zase komáři. S komáři mám problém každý večer, co jsem na cestě, s výjimkou vyšších hor, kde nebyli. Ve stanu mám plno krvavých šmouh. Krev je vždy moje, ovšem komáři byli národností různých. Nepříjemné na zdejší oblasti je to, že komáři útočí celý den. Připadám si jako kretén. Letní vedro a já jedu v šustákové soupravě s kapucí na hlavě. Večer mám opíchaný a oteklý obličej a hřbet rukou, kde jsou díry v rukavicích.

Jedu špatně a nemám vodu. Projíždím kolem několika stavení, ale ta jsou, předpokládám kvůli komárům, v létě opuštěná. Chytám defekt a mám toho dost. Nepojízdné kolo, nemám vodu, všude plno komárů, bloudím. Stavím stan a s myšlenkou na přísloví: „Ráno moudřejší večera“, jdu spát. Ráno se vyhlídky nelepší. Ne jedno, ale obě kola jsou prázdná. Za nepříjemné asistence komárů měním duše, rychle balím a pryč. Málo zratelná cesta se ztratila úplně a zase další defekt. Cestu, po které mám jet, vidím už snad dvacet kilometrů na druhé straně údolí. Dělí mě od ní potok a bažina s trávou, která je vyšší než já. Není zbylí. Dotahuju boty, ať je neztratím, a zkouším přejít. Močál není hluboký a 300 metrů jsem úspěšně zdolal za půl hodiny. Několik domů na druhé straně je opět prázdných, ale v jednom jsou konečně lidé. Chvilí se nemůžeme dohodnout, ale nakonec mě pozvali dovnitř. Vypil jsem snad dva litry čaje a pojedl. Čaj v Mongolsku dělají s mlékem a slaný. Nejčastější sýr je árol. Vyrábí se z kefiru, čerstvý je nasládlý a po vysušení je tvrdý a chuť taky změní. Trochu smrdí, bývají v něm chlupy a nečistoty, ale určitě bude výživný a dokonce mi začal chutnat. Večer před spaním jsem si dával vždy několik kousků jako pochoutku. Chléb podobný našemu je pouze ve městech. Kousky těsta smažené v tuku, to je nejčastější „chléb“ v jurtech. Po notné chvíli, když jsem se trochu vzpamatoval, jdu na kolo. Pláště jsou po 8 tisících kilometrech hotové. Nasazuju nové.

9.1.6 KAŽDÝ MONGOL MÁ SVOU CESTU

Zpochybním pravdivost tohoto přísloví. Podle počtu Mongolů a mého odhadu musí mít každý aspoň dvě. V horách byla údolí, tady ve stepi desítky cest a cestiček a křižovatek, ale která je ta pravá? Navíc hlavní cesta bývá nejméně rozbitá, tak je lepší jet po některé blízké vedlejší. A to je další zádrhel. Cestu, která vede 50 metrů vedle, není v rovné stepi vidět, pak přijde mírná zatáčka a hlavní navždy zmizí. Dobrý orientační bod je auto. Jedoucí auto a oblaka prachu za ním je možno vidět z velké dálky, ale opět - při provozu nula až několik aut denně - to není žádná výhra.

U nás používané rčení: „Všechny cesty vedou do Říma“ platí v pozmeněné podobě i tady. Kdykoli se ptám na cestu do Ulánbátaru, jedu správně. Stačí udržovat přibližný směr na východ a zcela jistě dojedete do hlavního města.

A ještě jedna zajímavost, každý, koho jsem se ptal, zná přesnou vzdálenost do Ulánbátaru. Zpočátku mě mátl, že některé dny jsem se i vzdaloval od cíle. I tento rozpor jsem si dokázal zdůvodnit. Protože má každý svoji cestu, musí být i vzdálenost do metropole různá. No a nějaká ta stavka na trase dlouhé dva tisíce kilometrů, když nebudeme malicherní, přece nic není. A tak se na většině rozcestí orientuju po čuchu a správnost svého rozhodnutí si ověřuju u nejbližšího domorodce, kterého potkám někdy ještě též den. Jindy se úkony jako křižovatka a ověření rozdělí na dny dva.

Do Ulánbátaru zbývá 1 000 kilometrů a posledních 430 je prý asfalt, což mi potvrdilo už několik řidičů. Dosavadní cesty mají dvě vady, které se opakují v různém pořadí každý den. První je „roleta“. Může být lehká, střední a těžká. Těžká roleta jsou 15 centimetrů vysoké hrby pravidelně se opakující po půl metru. Při jízdě musím stát v pedálech, kolo skáče jak kůzle a 10 km/hod je maximální rychlost, jakou se dá jet. Další vadou je písek. Vrstva větší než 5 centimetrů je neprůjezdná a kolo se musí tlačit. Roleta a písek se objevují každý den. Někdy je to pár kilometrů, jindy desítky.

Tlačím kolo kousek proti proudu řeky a dnes končím. Vypadám jako čuně. Všechno peru, včetně kola, přeskládávám, dělám údržbu. Voda v řece je teplá a dělá se na ní pěna, ale není zbylí, musím ji pít. Spoléhám na tablety. Injekce proti žlutence a tyfu taky nebyly zadarmo, tak ať se investice vrátí. Do deníku jsem nahrál:

„Piju vodu, ve které bych si doma neumyl ani nohy, no nohy snad, ale jinak nic.“

9.1.7 HOSTEM MINISTRA

Po dvou dnech dosahuji města Bajanhongor. Seznamuju se tu s ministrem kultury zdejšího kraje. (Mongolsko je rozděleno do 21 krajů nazývajících se ajmaky). Jdeme spolu nakoupit, do jeho kanceláře, na nádvoří už zavřeného muzea a jsem pozván na noc domů.

Tak jako u nás se vítá chlebem a solí, v Mongolsku k tomuto účelu slouží národní jídlo zvané „bůz“. Jsou to vařené tašky z těsta plněné mletým masem. Jsou chutné a dostal jsem přidáno ještě jednu misku. Na kopci za městem je památník bohyni města. Brahmamátra, žena na bílém slonu umístěném na kruhové stavbě, je viditelná ze všech míst ve městě a okolí.

Bajanhongor má 25 tisíc obyvatel, protože je léto. V zimě má 30 tisíc. Kočovali, kočují a kočovat budou. Obdivuji obyvatele jurty ve stepi, jak v tvrdých podmínkách chudé a většinou suché stepi dokážou žít. Bez elektřiny, teplé vody, zásobování, dopravní obsluhy, pouze se svými stády, která je živí a zároveň jsou jim obživou. Člověk jako já, zbaven vymožeností civilizace, by zde jistě nepřežil. Lidé tu žijí v souladu s přírodou téměř stejně jako za dob velkého Čingischána, kterého dodnes uctívají a jehož obraz je v mnohém domě a na všech bankovkách vyšší hodnoty.

S ministrem večer sedíme v baru u čínské piva. Je příjemné popíjet a poslouchat, jak se venku čerti žení, bouří a prší.

Další den vjíždím do hor. Ráno je krásně, před polednem se zatáhlo, fouká, je zima a v poledne prší. Za deště vyjíždím do sedla. Postavení stanu, odstojení kola a zalezení dovnitř trvá míň jak pět minut. Pravidelným dvouměsíčním tréninkem v této činnosti se pracovávám k dokonalosti.

Dva dny projíždím přes hory. Sedla, údolí, řeky, skály. Mému oku lahodící krajina. Jediné, co mi vadí, je deštivé počasí bránící ve vyhlídkách do kraje a focení.

9.1.8 KONEČNĚ ASFALT

Dnes nastala 1 500 km očekávaná chvíle. Jsem 430 km od Ulánbátaru a začala cesta neširoká, nekvalitní, ale asfaltová.

Za tři dny následuje Ulánbátar. Všechna města, která jsem v Mongolsku zatím projel, podle evropských měřítek připomínala spíš vesnice. Téměř sedmisettisícová metropole Mongolska je už normální velkoměsto. Auta, autobusy, trolejbusy, výškové budovy, plno lidí - sbohem pustino. Nevím proč, ale velká města nemám rád, působí mi stres a na svých cestách je považuji za nutné zlo a jejich návštěvu beru jako nepříliš oblíbenou povinnost. Ve městech je plno cizích a neznámých lidí, zatímco potkáte-li člověka v pustině, k dobrým zvykům patří zastavit, pohovořit společným, nebo každý svým jazykem, vykourit cigaretu, popřát hodně štěstí a zase se rozejít, ale ne už jako cizí, ale jako lidé, kterým osud dopřál kratičké a možná jediné setkání jejich životních drah. A kvůli těmto nepatrným průsečíkům v mém životě mám rád pusté kraje, kde každý poutník je tak trochu přítel.

Tak ještě trochu dat. Dnes jsem 83. den na cestě a z Olomouce do Ulánbátaru jsem najel 9 200 km.

9.1.9 ULÁNBÁTAR

Doby, kdy jsme měli v Mongolsku velvyslanectví, jsou dávno pryč a skutečnost, že zde je pouze konzulární oddělení sídlící v diplomatickém domě, nevzali na vědomí ani mnozí Mongolci. Kličky po městě a teprve po hodně chvíli jsem ho našel. Mám několik úkolů. Pokusit se získat čínské vízum, prodloužit mongolské, a počkat na náhradní díly z domova, které ještě na konzulát nepřišly.

Konzul, pan Okunek, ochotně radí, obvolává, zařizuje. S řidičem konzulátu Okim jdeme shánět někoho, kdo mi svaří prasklý držák brašny na řídítkách. Svářeče jsme nesehnali, ale sehnali jsme jiné věci. Na návštěvě u jeho přátel jsem dostal bohatě najíst, další kamarádi nejsou doma, tak jdeme chvíli do baru. Večer se setkáváme, a protože nemám kde spát, domlouváme nocleh. Když jsme se seznámili, je třeba to oslavit, navrhuji mi noví přátelé. Jdeme koupit pití. Trochu mě zarazilo, že oni vybrali a já jsem zaplatil. Tato investice se mi ovšem několikanásobně vrátila. Dvanáct dní, které jsem strávil v Ulánbátaru, mám nocleh u Megiho zdarma.

Úřady, to mě jednou zničí. Nudím se. V budhistickém chrámu jsem byl nejmíň pětkrát, muzea, královský palác, socialistický památník na kopci nad řekou, všechno jsem prošel. Několikrát jsem navštívil trh. Dá se tu sehnat téměř vše dokonce i něco na kolo. Nové sedmikolečko čínské provenience se dá pořídit za dva dolary, sluchátka k „volkmenu“ za 1/3 dolaru a film Agfa za necelé dva dolary. Je třeba nakupovat obezřetně, někteří trhovci při spatření cizince dokáží nasadit astronomické ceny. Desátý den mě doktor Gombo pozval na chatu. Doktor Gombo je Megiho otec a já vlastně bydlím v jeho bytě. Je mu 73 let, každé ráno přijede 15 km na kole z chaty, v bytě se převleče, umyje a jde do nemocnice, odpoledne zase sedne na kolo a jede na chatu. Je to kousek za městem a je tu krásně. Pojedli jsme bůz a já se jdu toulat po okolních kopcích. Večer s jeho paní, lékařkou na penzi, vyrábíme rusko - česko - mongolský slovník.

A ještě jedna příhoda. Pán, který jezdil v Mongolsku s geology, mně v Olomouci mimo jiné říkal:

„Kumys, když vypiješ poprvé, tak se posereš, ale potom už to bude dobrý.“

Kumys piju už měsíc a nic. Dnes jsem vypil s doktorem snad tři litry a předpověď se vyplnila. Ještě, že jsem byl sám v horách. Tak čínské vízum mám, mongolské je prodloužené, náhradní díly přišly, trochu poskládat kolo a jedu dál.

9.1.10 NA VÝLETĚ V POUŠTI GOBI

Čtyřicet kilometrů za Ulánbátarem končí asfalt a začínají opět cesty necesty. Blížím se k poušti Gobi a pokračuji na jih k hranicím s Čínou. Podél transmongolské magistrály. Orientace je brnkačka.

V poušti Gobi se najde vše. Včera jsem našel kousek nerezové trubky a byl to přesný průměr na opravu zlomené konstrukce stanu. Posledních několik dnů se ze mě stal vášnivý sběratel minerálů. Denně nasbírám několik kilo kamení, večer přeberu a většinu vyhodím a další den znovu. Domů jsem dovezl fluorit, acháty, jaspisy, opály, chalcedony a další šutry z pouště. Jiné věci se tu nevyskytují vůbec. Například Olgoj Chorchoj je určitě známější u nás doma než tady v Mongolsku. Často se na něj ptám a snad jen dvakrát věděli, o čem je řeč, dokonce v národním muzeu v Ulánbátaru, kde mají několik metrů vysokou kostru dinosaura, ho nemají ve vitríně, a co víc, ani nevědí, že něco takového existuje. Možná to není červ, ale had, a metrová svlečená kůže, kterou jsem v poušti našel, patřila právě jemu, a možná je to všechno jen pověst.

Na hranice s Čínou zbývá 100 km, nemůžu se dočkat, vymyslím zkratky a ztratil jsem cestu. V hlubokém písku poponáším kolo (tlačit se nedá), dva, možná tři kilometry jdu tři hodiny a je to dřina. Večer mám zase cestu a koleje.

Je 15. září a v noci mrzlo. Ráno, když balím stan, tak to křupe. Trať vede přes kopce a cesta vede jinudy a opět trochu bloudím.

9.1.11 POZVÁNÍ NA ZABIJAČKU

Objevil jsem jurty a jdu se zeptat na cestu. Právě tu píchli kozla, tak pozoruju zabijačku. Je to bezodpadová technologie jako u nás, když se zabíjí čuník. Chlapi rozporcují maso, ženský perou střeva, i když dva hrnky vody určené k této operaci se mi zdá poněkud málo. Střeva se plní směsí krve, mouky, cibule a s vnitřnostmi se vaří v kotli, kam přihodili i hlavu, kterou stáhli a pilkou uřezali rohy. Čekám, až se maso uvaří a jsem svědkem přípravy místní pochoutky. V jurtách se topí sušeným trusem a k příkládání slouží železné kleště podobné velkým nůžkám. Žena, která topí pod kotlem, bere do kleští na trus kus jater a přímo nad ohněm je chvíli opéká, pak je zabalí do pohrudnice a opět opeče. Při krájení z nich teče ještě krev. Tak tohle zrovna nemusím. Počkal jsem až na maso z kotle. Ještě kupuju árol. To je taky zajímavé. Tady si za něj vzali peníze. Kupoval jsem ho snad už desetkrát a vždy jsem ho dostal zadarmo. Je to jejich domácí výrobek a ten dávají zdarma. Po obědě se chystám k odchodu. Nutno podotknout, že zde nikdo rusky neuměl, tak se domlouváme rukama.

Muž, u kterého jsem na návštěvě, si vzpomněl na mongolský zvyk nabídnout hostovi svou ženu. Rukama ukazuje, že já, jeho žena a on budem spát spolu v posteli. Čtenáře těšící se na sexuální příhody zklamou. Nevím sice přesně, jak si to hůša představoval, ale raději jsem se rozloučil a zbaběle jsem prchl. Doufám, že se on ani jeho žena neurazili. Neboť k dalším zvykům v jurtech patří, pokud vás pozvou dovnitř, přijmout vše, co vám nabídnou. Opak se považuje za urážku.

9.1.12 „BAJAR TAI“ MONGOLSKO

Spím kousek před Zaminvudem, kde je už hranice, a těším se na kvalitní čínský asfalt. V Mongolsku jsem najel 2 900 km, z toho odhaduju tak 2 400 km terénem, a to mi stačilo.

Na hranicích byly zase problémy, ale odpoledne jsem se dostal konečně do městečka Erehot - a to je už Čína.

9.1.13 ČESKO - MONGOLSKÝ SLOVNÍK

dobrý den sein beno (<i>sejn benü</i>)	sůl davs (<i>daus</i>)
na shledanou bajar tai (<i>bejer te</i>)	kozerva kansérva (<i>rusky</i>)
děkuji bajar laa (<i>bajer lá</i>)	baterie bataréja (<i>rusky</i>)
voda os (<i>ous</i>)	salám kalbasa (<i>rusky</i>)
vlasy (pozor) us (<i>ús</i>)	cesta zam (<i>dzam</i>)
mléko suu (<i>sü</i>)	vlak galtereg (<i>galtirgh</i>)
kefír tarak (<i>tarak</i>)	miska na čaj ajaga (<i>ajirgh</i>)
kvašené kobyli mléko kumys (<i>kumys</i>)	lžička chalbag (<i>halbag</i>)
sýr bjaslak (<i>bjaslak</i>)	vidlička seree (<i>seré</i>)
sýr z kefíru aarol (<i>árol</i>)	nůž chotga (<i>chotog</i>)
máslo orum (<i>órum</i>)	čínské hůlky savch (<i>sauch</i>)
chléb talch (<i>talch</i>)	talíř tavag (<i>taog</i>)
maso mach (<i>mah</i>)	umyvadlo savan (<i>saun</i>)
brambor tums (<i>túms</i>)	ručník alčoro (<i>alčór</i>)
rýže cagaanbuda (<i>cagánbudá</i>)	žena echner (<i>echner</i>)
zele baicaa (<i>béca</i>)	muž nochr (<i>nochr</i>)
rajče ulaanlol (<i>ulánlol</i>)	dcera ochin (<i>ochin</i>)
cibule songino (<i>songin</i>)	syn chuu (<i>chú</i>)
česnek sarimis (<i>sarmís</i>)	děda ovoo (<i>ovó</i>)
ryby zagas (<i>dzagaz</i>)	babička emee (<i>emé</i>)

9.2 Cesta na východ

9.2.1 Jak se tam dostat?

V současné době jsou vlastně jen dva způsoby jak se dostat do Ulanbátaru (a vlastně i do Mongolska).

- Letadlem (poněkud dražší a méně "zábavnější")
- Vlákem (z Ruska nebo z Číny)

Na Rusko-Mongolských hranicích (konkrétně v *Nauški* na ruském území) jsme se ptali jak je to s přechodem pro pěší. Bylo nám řečeno, že se staví a že v současné době není jiná možnost jak přejít hranice než vlakem (a samozřejmě letadlem).

9.2.2 Pití čaje v Mongolsku

Na mongolský čaj potřebujete především lisovaný zelený čaj, dále pak mléko, máslo, mouku a sůl. Mléko podle chuti: kravské, kozí, ovčí, kobyli nebo velbloudí. Máslo někde nahrazují vyškvařeným hovězím nebo skopovým lojem. Mouka se hodí jakákoliv, občas se do ní přidávají jáhly či rýže.

Čaj rozetřete na prášek. Jednu až tři lžičky prášku zalijte litrem studené vody a postavte na oheň. Když se voda začne vařit, přilijte 0,25-0,5 l mléka, jednu lžičku rozpuštěného másla, 50-100g mouky předem opražené na tuku a půl nebo čtvrt sklenice jáhel nebo rýže. Povařte do měkka, osolte, opepřete (to není vtip, Mongolové čaj skutečně někdy pepří).

9.3 Ulaanbaatar

Ulanbátar má asi 600 000 tisíc lidí, což je vlastně 1/4 všech obyvatel. Domluvíte se tady rusky (nejsnáze), anglicky (to už docela hůř) ale taky třeba **česky**. Podle informací z českého konzulátu žije v Mongolsku asi 25 000 lidí, kteří studovali v bývalém Československu, tudíž je velká šance že ještě umí česky, nebo aspoň rozumí. Ulanbátar je město mnoha kontrastů. Uprostřed města stojí v dřevěných ohradách jurty a o kousek vedle supermoderní mrakodrapy. Myslím, že než jakýkoliv popis je lepší podívat se na fotky.

Když už budete v Ulanbátaru, můžete si zajít do české "Restaurace Praha" (viz [mapa](#)) na české jídlo a pivo. Jídlo tam není drahé (v průměru asi tak 1.5\$), zato pivo už je dražší. V tomto směru bych doporučoval, když už bez toho piva nemůžete být,

koupit si někde pivo čínské (640 ml), které je 5x levnější a rozhodně ne 5x horší. Pozor lahve od tohoto piva **nejsou** zálohované.

9.3.1 Co musíte v Ulaanbaataru a okolo vidět

I když jsme byli v podstatě jenom v Ulanbátaru, i tam je toho spousta k vidění. Asi se vám "nepoštěstí" zůstat v Ulanbátaru jenom jeden den, protože vlaky do Moskvy (a do Ruska) jezdí jenom 3x týdně. Takže budete mít dost času se porozhlídnout po městě.

9.3.1.1 Chrámý

Asi jako první vás zaujme komplex chrámů *Gandantegchinien Khiid* (anglický přepis). V jednom z chrámů - *Magjid Janraisig Suru*, se nachází 25 metrů vysoká, 20 tun těžká, měděná, pozlacená socha *Migjid Janraisig* (socha Budhy). Je opravdu impozantní a stojí za to ji vidět.

9.3.1.2 Muzea

Krom toho jsou ve městě taky různá muzea. V přírodovědeckém muzeu najdete například kostru dinosaura v životní velikosti. Bohužel my jsme ji neviděli, protože toto muzeum bylo zrovna v rekonstrukci. Zato se nám jeden člověk, před tímto muzeem, snažil prodat dinosauří vejce (nepovedlo se mu to :-). Tak jsme si místo toho zašli do muzea Mongolské historie. Provede Vás mongolskou historií od pravěku až do současnosti. Při prohlídce doporučuji obrnit se trpělivostí a i když to všechno jenom proběhnete, docela určitě si pěkně (u)(o)šoupete nohy.

9.3.1.3 Památník Zaisan - vyhlídka

Nachází se na kopci nedaleko za městem, takže tam dojdete v pohodě i pěšky. Po cestě minete tank (památník na II. sv.válku) a komplex chrámů. Památník tvoří panoramatická mozaika s výjevy budování komunismu. Je odtud hezký výhled nejen na město, ale i na kopce kolem. Vemte si s sebou dalekohled :-)

9.3.1.4 Chrám Mandžšir a přírodní muzeum

Nachází se nedaleko města *Zunmod* (asi 40km od Ulanbátaru), kam se dostanete mikrobusem za 250 tugriků. Dále půjdete pěšky asi 7km k muzeu. Ptejte se na *muzej*. Málokdo totiž umí jinak než mongolsky a *muzej* znamená muzeum i v mongolštině. Vstupné činí 2\$ (nebo ekvivalent v tugrikách). Dostanete dokonce i nějaký ten leták. Z vlastního chrámu zůstali už jenom základy, tak se podívejte aspoň po muzeu. Neotálejte s cestou zpátky, aby vám ze *Zunmodu* ještě jel nějaký mikrobusem! Nemají totiž pevný jízdní řád, prostě až se naplní, tak se jede :-)

U chrámu nás přepadla bouřka. Začaly padat kroupy neuvěřitelných rozměrů :-)

9.3.2 Nákupy

Ceny jsou v Mongolsku příznivější než v Rusku. Určitě se běžte podívat do Státního obchodníku (*State Department Store*). Sice tam nic moc nemají, ale je to největší obchodník ve městě.

Spousta věcí, vlastně úplně všechno, se dá koupit na trhu. Některé menší jsou často zastrčeny někde ve městě, ale největší z nich je kousek mimo centrum. Dá se tam dojet pěšky, nebo za 200 tugriků mikrobusem. Stačí když řeknete že chcete na trh, oni už budou vědět. Trh se řekne *Zach*. Platí se tam vstupné, ale je tak malé, že už jsem zapomněl kolik (asi 20 tugriků). Dá se tam koupit skutečně všechno, najdete tam spoutu hezkých suvenýrů i dárků pro vaše známé. Dávejte si pozor na kapsáře. Bývá tam **velká** tlačnice, proto je lepší jít tam dopoledne kolem 9 až 10 hodiny.

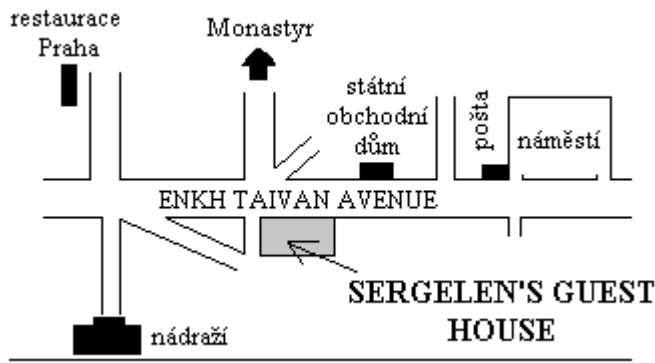
9.3.3 Kde a jak žít v Ulaanbaataru

Sehnat ubytování v Ulanbátaru není až tak velký problém jak by se mohlo zdát. Dám vám tip na bydlení za 5\$ na noc (léto 1998) s teplou sprchou, sporákem a postelí. Doporučuje ho i "Lonely Planet" a navíc majitel umí **česky!** Adresa je:

Sergelen's Guest House
Ulaanbaatar - 44
P.O.Box 44/542
Mongolia
tel.: (mongolsko) 320267

Adresa pro taxi:

A pokud to snad budete hledat sami tak tady je velice neumělý schematický náčrtek:



Když budete stát před tou budovou (je to obyčejná bytovka, ta prvni zprava) projděte dozadu (vpravo je ulička) a v přízemí je to ten byt vpravo.

Sergelen mluví anglicky, ale když mu dáte chvílku na nadechnutí, tak si vzpomene a mluví velice dobře **česky!!**

10 Mongolské dobrodružstvo - cestopis

10.1 Transibírská magistrála

Jednoduchá cesta. Dva dni do Moskvy, štyri do Irkutsku. Nekonečné vlakové blues Transsibírskej magistrály. Brezy, a zase len brezy, v utorok a vo štvrtok na pár hodín borovice. Stovky sibírskych miest a dedín, stohektárové polia, pustá step, pariaca sa tajga a deň ktorý sa skraca ako prechádzame časovými pásmami, ktorých má Rusko dokopy tuším 11. Volga, Irtyš, Ob, Jenisej, Angara, Ural, Perm, Sverdlovsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk..., všetky tie názvy z križovky sa zmiešali v jeden zlý azbukový sen a človek otupený nekonečným rytmom železničných podvalov stráca zmysel vnímať výnimočnosť chvíle. Každé 3 - 4 hodiny vlak zastaví, je to príležitosť na pretiahnutie sa chôdzou po peróne a hlavne nakúpiť nejaké potraviny. Bábušky predávajú údené ryby, držiace ich za chvosty ako karty, k tomu do novín zabalené varené zemiaky a tradičné šašliky.

Pasažieri sa menia a podrobujú nás vždy križovému výsluchu. Nás je päť a ich mraky. Prvé dva dni nás to baví, precvičujeme si takmer zabudnutú ruštinu, potom ale nechtiac vychutnávame obrátenú stranu cestovania vo vagóne bez kupé, kde sa o päť metrov štvorcových životného priestoru delí 6 ľudí. Chlapom z Náhorného Karabachu otrasne páchnu nohy a mladší z nich je múdry ako opica, no našťastie vystupujú už v Omsku. Cestujú s nami piati námorníci z baltickej flotily - "marjaki", idú domov na dovolenku po takmer dvoch rokoch, majú super pásikavé tričky a každému ochotnému počúvať rozprávajú donekonečna o svojom križníku, na ktorom slúžia.

10.2 Bajkal, alebo ako stopnúť vlak

Irkutsk. V meste neslávne známom svojou mafiou sa nás ešte na stanici ujíma skialpinistka Lena a poradí nám cestu ku Bajkalskému jazeru loďou po rieke Angare. Buržoázna plavba proti prúdu desiatich Dunajov sa končí v prístave Port Bajkal, dedine na konci sveta, navyše s najhnusnejším pivom v tomto kúte galaxie. Vraký lodí chátrajú v dokoch a na hrdzavejúcich mólach decká pália pneumatiky a hrajú sa dobyvačné hry. Vytiekajúce svinstvá z lodí síce nemôžu otráviť celú nekonečnú plochu Bajkalu, no piť vodu rovno z jazera si už netrúfame.

Dážď mení naše turistické plány na Bajkale, tak si na ďalší deň stopneme okoloidúci pobrežný vlak. Vraj zastavujú na Fantu, ale funguje aj Bonaqua. Hlučný chlapi vo vagóne hrajú karty a vycierajú na nás strieborné zuby, ktoré každú polhodinu čistia dvojdecákom vodky. Vlak nás dovezie do mestečka Sľudjanka, v okolí ktorého sú známe náleziská tmavej sľudy - flogopitu a tak chvíľu beháme po haldách aby sme obohatili svoje aj školské zbierky. Spíme u podnikateľa Žigalova, ktorý vlastní mineralogické múzeum a ubytovňu s najsmradľavejšou latrínou medzi Moskvou a Ochotským morom. Navštevujeme ju len v slípoch a topánkach, aby nám nenasmradili veci. Myslel som si, že nemôže byť nič horšie ako staničná "výkalovňa" na stanici v Sofii, ale to som bol ešte mladý a naivný. Žigalovova zbierka minerálov má hodnotu vyše milióna dolárov a tak sa ho pýtam, či nemá problémy s mafiou - Da, ješ' takoj problém, nu ničevó, u nas tóže mafia - a odhalí pod kabátom schovanú "devinu"... V Naušky, na rusko - mongolských hraniciach sa pred stanicou na ulici práve koná zabíjačka - na betónovom kvádre medzi kalužami špinavej vody mužiček veľkou sekerou seká do akéhosi úbohého zvera a vedľa stojaca báryšna vzápätí expeduje kusy mŕtvoly zákazníkom stojacim v rade. Aktivista Slobody Zvierat by skolaboval...

Ruské hranice oboma smermi sú vždy trochu stres a tak nervózne čakanie na vlak trávime exkurziou po miestnych obchodoch, z ktorých dýchajú naše povojnové roky. Rozbité sklá na pekárni sú zatreté hlinou a v potravinách sa stále chodí od pultu s bločkom ku kase na druhej strane predajne a potom zasa späť k pultu pre tovar. Oproti roku 1992, keď som bol v Rusku prvýkrát, sa ale sortiment neporovnateľne zmenil, ceny však bohužiaľ tiež. To platí všeobecne - 3500 km vlakom z

Murmanska do Čopu nás vtedy stálo asi 150 korún, dnes (júl 1997) zaplatíte za podobnú trasu 2500. Lacný Sojuz je minulosťou.

10.3 *Klasická chuť Mongolska*

V Ulánbátare pred stanicou nás za raného šera víta billboard Vitany - KLASICKÁ CHUŤ a to pekne v češtine. Vytriešťame na to oči a na okamih zapochybujeme, kamže nás to celú noc ten vlak viezol, či náhodou nie sme v nejakom čs. gulagu kdesi pri Vorkute... Mongolsko je krajina prekvapení a mali sme sa o tom presvedčiť ešte neraz.

V hlavnom meste za tri dni vybavíme všetko potrebné a vyrážame na sever k ruským hraniciam k jazeru Chovsgol nuur. Podľa mapy je to asi 700 km, čo v Mongolsku znamená okolo 45 hodín čistej jazdy štýlom Camel-Trophy. Treba k tomu ale prirátat meškania, poruchy, (ne)zjazdnosť ciest, broditel'nosť tokov ako aj počet šoférových známych po ceste od čoho sa zase odvíja hĺbka šoférovho delíria a počet zablúdení. To všetko sa zvyčajne násobí ešte bulharským koeficientom od -0,x do x, čiže tá istá trasa môže trvať dva dni ale kľudne aj dva týždne

10.4 *Chovschod nuur*

Šťastie nám praje a tak už na piaty deň dorážame do Khatgalu, dediny na južnom brehu jazera. A je to práve včas, pretože začínajúci štvordňový dážď spôsobí potopu, ktorá Khatgal na niekoľko dní odreže od sveta. Trávime tento čas v drevenom dome u priateľského šoféra Njandorža, nášho náhodného známeho a učíme sa jazdiť na malých mongolských koníkoch. Od mladého mongola Nímu si za 110 dolárov požičiavame šesť koní a dohodneme sa, že nás povedie spolu so svojimi bratmi pozdĺž západného brehu jazera pod priesmyk Jiglegyn Davaa, čo je asi 100 km v sedle. Odtiaľ plánujeme pokračovať už po svojich cez neznáme hory Khordil Sardag. Po štyroch dňoch sa nezapodnuteľne lúčime s našim hosťiteľom a začíname púť horskou tajgou. Cesta vedie smrekovcovými lesmi s hlbokým machom, do ktorého sa zabárajú nepodkuté kopytá koní. Pôda permafrostu rozmŕza len do istej hĺbky, takže voda sa drží na povrchu a znepríjemňuje nám život. Inokedy vedieme kone popri brehu jazera a na rovnejších miestach sa oddávame kráse cvalu. V strmom svahu sa pošmykne náš záložný kôň a v zúfalých saltách sa aj s našou batožinou kotúľa dolu svahom. Zdá sa, že už je po ňom, o chvíľu je však opäť na nohách a ideme ďalej. Pred 700 rokmi za čias veľkých chánov viedli Mongoli svoje dobyvačné výpravy práve z chrbtov týchto nenáročných a spoľahlivých zvierat, ktoré boli schopné prežiť aj dlhé cesty do Európy. Z kobyliet mlieka sa skvasením vyrába celkom chutný kumys a jeho destiláciou zas nechutný alkohol arjag. V čase núdze ich mäso nahradí baraninu. Kefu vidia len v čase sviatku Nadaam, nevedia, čo je podkova a o potravu sa musia postarať sami. Väčšinu roka sa polodivé voľne pasú vo veľkých stádach a na ich chytenie Mongoli používajú tzv. urgu - dlhú tyč na konci so sľučkou. Zaháňanie koní je detská práca a často len 7 - 8 ročný chlapec ju robia rutinne a odmalička privyknutí na sedlo tvoria s koňom elegantnú dvojicu. Mongoli sú vzrastom malí a také sú aj ich kone. Nemáme žiadne skúsenosti s jazdením a už vôbec nemáme vypestované isté potrebné svalové partie, takže po troch dňoch toho majú tí menší romantici plné zuby. Kamarátovi Ondrišovi sa zodretá koža hojí ešte mesiac.

10.5 *Londonovka*

Noci trávime na brehu jazera, chytáme akési pstruhovité ryby a opekáme ich na ohni. V blízkosti sa pokojne pasú naše kone a zo stromu na nás zvedavo pozerá čosi ako veverička. Nad jazerom sú hneď dve dúhy nad sebou a v diaľke vidieť buriatskú svätú horu Munku Sardig. Boží kľud všade naokolo. Sme ďaleko od inflácie, korupcie, konjunktúry, demokratúry, emancipácie, ústavného súdu, pasívneho salda, digitalizácie, xenofóbie a vôbec všetkých tých mutácií a -izmov ktoré nám denne otravujú život. Tu na úpätí Khordil Sardagu si prežívame svoje londonovské sny o divočine. Ráno na štvrtý deň sa lúčime s Nímom a jeho bratmi, a ďalej šliapeme do sedla Jiglegyn. Máme tri úplne rozdielne mapy, hotové skvosty miestnej kartografie a tak ideme radšej podľa kompasu a výškomeru. Prechádzame spálenými lesmi a brodíme sa rozmrznutým permafrostom. Za sedlom sa krajina mení, vchádzame do prameniska mohutného Jeniseja a ďalšie tri dni ideme ľadovcami tvarovaným údolím za stáleho brodenia divočiacej rieky. Dva dni táboríme pod vysokým smrekovcom a podnikáme výlet na fotogenický kopec neďaleko nášho campu. Z vrcholu vidno ligotavú hladinu jazera Hovsgol na východe a do večnej hmly ponorenú Ulaan Tajgu na západe. Niekoľko vrcholov je pod snehom, môžu mať okolo 3500m. Náš kopec meria podľa výškomera len 2440m a tak nestál mapérom za pozornosť. Nechávame na vrchole správu, takže keby ste náhodou raz išli okolo ...

Cestou späť si pochutnávame na čučoriedkách, rebarbore a divej ríbezli a vyhýbame sa akýmsi pichľavým sukulentom a tiež macom všežravým, ktorých tu je vraj požehnané. Nezvyknutý na krajinu bez meliorácií a správne upraveného toku užasnutu sledujeme ako slušná rieka na niekoľkých metroch mizne celá vo svojich štrkových náplavoch a po zbytok dňa nás necháva bez vody. Voda je vôbec v Mongolsku vážna vec - buď jej je priveľa, buď primálo, raz je všade až ju preklíňaš a inokedy od pár hltov závisí tvoj život. Na Gobi s ňou paradoxne nie je problém v lete, ale hlavne v zime - pri 40-stupňových mrazoch nedobytne zamŕza v studniach. Po dlhom hľadaní odkiaľsi nakvapkáme štyri litre tmavožltej tekutiny a po pridaní Dikacitu ako-tak zaháňame smäd. Dikacit je dezinfekčný prostriedok českej armády, je účinný, ale voda s ním chutí ako z bazénu.

10.6 *Opitý Zooloon*

Smädným ránom pokračujeme k osade Zooloon aby sme v nej uviazli a tri dni sa trápili s miestnymi osadníkmi, ktorí nevychádzajú z alkoholového opojenia. Pôvodným cieľom nášho putovania do Ulaan Tajgy malo byť vystopovanie tajomného národa alebo skôr len kmeňa Catánov, ktorý v počte už asi len 200 ľudí kočuje v blízkosti ruských hraníc. Spôsob života Catánov je odlišný od mongolského - živia sa podobne ako kedysi európsky Laponci chovom sobov - jazdia na nich, jedia ich mäso, z mlieka vyrábajú syry, obliekajú sa do ich kožušín, ktoré tiež používajú na stavbu stanov, odlišných od jurt a vôbec súčiastky soba využijú na výrobu všetkého potrebného pre domácnosť. Miestne pomery, vrtkavosť počasia a extrémna neschodnosť terénu nás nakoniec prinútili od tohto plánu upustiť. Neskôr stretneme jeden francúzsky pár, ktorý si najal akéhosi miestneho medveďobjca a ten sa s nimi týždeň predieral tajgou až nejaké rodiny Catánov našli a vraj to stálo za to.

V opitom Zooloone od nás požadujú zakúpenie špeciálnych víz za návštevu ich úžasného okresu a vôbec snažia sa z nás vymačkať aspoň tugrik. Nerátali však s takým tvrdošijným odporom a nakoniec sa karta obrátila. Potrebujeme zohnať čím skôr auto do Moronu, 200 km vzdialeného krajského mesta odkiaľ chodí dvakrát do týždňa autobus do Ulánbátaru. Keďže miestny neprejavujú spočiatku veľkú ochotu nám pomôcť, skôr naopak, ubytujeme sa priamo v kancelárii starostu a mienime tam zostať dokiaľ sa naša vec nevyrieši. A tak nasleduje nekonečné zháňanie auta, ktoré keď už je, tak hodinu pred odchodom šofér zistí, že nemá benzín, potom benzín krvopotne zoženieme, medzitým sa auto pokazí, tak zháňame iné, lenže do rána zase náš dodávateľ onen benzín prepíše... Toto sa opakuje viackrát a k tomu sa ešte množia poplašné správy o zjazdnosti cesty kvôli pretrvávajúcim dažďom. Do tejto neutešenej situácie na obed tretieho dňa zatrubí pod oknom kancelárie modrý sovietsky džíp značky UVAZ a vôbec nám nevádi, že okrem poltony batožiny sa v ňom povezieme deviat. Najmenší z nás - Ondro zaujíma pozíciu v batožinovom priestore, čo sa mu neskôr stane takmer osudným

Už po troch hodinách jazdy - nejazdy zastavujeme pri brode cez rozvodnenú riečku tak o veľkosti Váhu v Trenčíne. Z vody ťahá traktor veľké "vezdechodnie gruzaviky", proti ktorým je náš džíp nevinný angličák. Na brehu sa sušia ľudia, zvieratá, spomedzi rôzneho tovaru nás upúta múka - a na svete je tajomstvo zvláštnej chuti mongolského chleba - riečny kal, tá tajomná ingrediencia dodávajúca mu jedinečnú chuť, ktorá preráža aj po dôkladnom prepečení chleba nad ohňom a berie ti chuť do jedla.

Tušíme ďalšie zdržanie, bude treba deň - dva počkať. Náš šofér nás ale vyvádza z omylu - kúskami handry utesňuje sviečky zapaľovania, počká kým sa ochladí motor a zaradiac redukcii vchádzame do prúdu. Po dvadsiatich metroch však motor posledný raz kýchne a zastavujeme v meter hlbokéj vode. Rýchly prúd nás podmýva a my sedíme po pás v špinavej vode. Auto sa nebezpečne nahýna a prúd vody blokuje dvere. Ktośi nám na pomoc hádže lano, šofér ho zle upevní a po jeho odtrhnutí sa situácia ešte zhoršuje. Vody je už do pol okna a všetci sa snažíme telami vyrovnáť nerovnováhu. V zúfalej situácii je hlavne Ondriš, uväznený medzi batohmi plánuje s nožom v ruke opustiť auto rozrezaním strešnej plachty. Ostatný čakáme na šoférovo znamenie vyskakovať z auta poslednými dostupnými dverami. Druhý otras by už auto nevydržalo a prevrhlo sa. Riskantným manévrom šofér upevní lano ešte raz a každý sám podľa svojich možností hypnotizuje lano a sľubuje Bohu čoho všetkého sa zriekne ak toto prežijeme bez úrazu. Traktor ešte zopárkrát prešmykne, ale nakoniec zaberie a my tých druhých dvadsať metrov nedýchajúc a so srdcom v krku úspešne zdolávame. Za päť hodín je auto opäť pojazdné a relly pokračuje ešte 40 hodín. Polomŕtvy prichádzame do Ulánbátaru a trávime víkend v prenajatom byte. Zistenie, že v byte sa nachádza aj funkčná vaňa takmer spôsobí prvú krízu v našej výprave.

10.7 *To není možné*

Ulánbátar nie je veľmi vzrušujúce mesto, no nás nemiňajú šokujúce stretnutia. Vitana hneď prvý deň bolo dosť silné kafe, ale tým to neskončilo. S kamarátom Janom telefonujeme na hlavnej pošte, keď vidím na Janovej tvári bleskovú zmenu ako oči vytriešťajúc na takmer dvojmetrového chlapíka neveriaco kričí: "To není možné - si to ty?" - spolužiak Batcengel z našej fakulty, s ktorým sme nijako neboli dohodnutí si práve kupuje pohľadnice. Svet je malý, to je známe, ale že až tak?! Po štyroch rokoch len včera priletel do vlasti a tak má trochu problém sa v tomto dynamicky sa rozvíjajúcom meste zorientovať a my sme už máme svoje miesta a vieme, čo sa oplatí a čo nie a kde je dobré dať si večer schôdzku. On nám zase na oplátku porozprával novinky z našej domoviny a v takejto zvláštnej symbióze sme uprostred hlavného mesta dlho do noci preberali slovenské a mongolské aktuálne témy.

10.8 *Gobi*

Po trojdňovom oddychu v Ulánbátare vyrážame na juh, do púštneho okresu Omnoogov. Nechcel som sem ísť, čo už len narobíš na púšti. Omyl. Púšť je krásna. Hovorí sa, že Gobi je strašná, čo možno platí v zime, keď teplota môže klesnúť až na -50° C, pretože mám nutkanie opustiť kamarátov a putovať len tak, kam ma nohy ponosú a som si istý že sa to dá. To ticho a nekonečný priestor, zvláštne pastelové farby pri západe slnka a dlhé tiene vytvárajú atmosféru, ktorá sa dá umocniť iba samotou. Ale obmedzená platnosť víz, tejto čiernej mory každého pútnika, čo pristiňuje krídla príliš slobodným deťom, nás núti držať sa pri zemi a šetriť časom.

10.9 Púštne mesto

V púštnom meste Dalanzadgad, ako sme si už zvykli, sa tri dni zdržíme zháňaním auta. Mesto leží neďaleko čínskych hraníc a žije z obchodu. Je tu bohatý trh s hojnosťou všetkého - od prevodovky na UVAZ až po DISKO kekse, ktoré sú mimochodom všade. V tržnici kúpime dve kilá ľavy a naši priatelia, v ktorých jurte bývame, varia na obed "buuz", špecialitu a la ravioly, s ingredienciou púšte - pieskom, ktorý je tiež všade. Ten na Gobi neodmysliteľne patrí k jedlu, večne škripe pod zubami - či sa ti to páči, alebo nie. Na druhý deň večer, keď o nás už vie celé mesto, nás predavač z tržnice vyzve za ich športový klub na basketbalový zápas. On aj jeho kamoši sú namakaní športovci, a my sme zase všetko dosť nešportové typy, našim veľkým tromfom je ale výška. Mongolov je viac, my zase hráme obutí. Nerovný boj, vyhrali sme len tak-tak. Po zápase chalani prinesú do našej jurty gitaru. Moja radosť však rýchlo končí po poznaní, že chýba dôležitá struna. Ale mongoli sú čarodeji - z kusa elektrického kábla vytiahnu kus drôtu, trochu ho stenčia tupou stranou noža a vraj - na, hraj! Akokoľvek si myslím, že som človek otvorený pre iné názory, toto je predsa len mimo mojej fantázie. Ale skúsím to a - div divúci - funguje to. Niekoľko hodín sa takto bavíme, večierok nemá konca kraja, trikrát sa lúčime, no Mongoli sú neúnavní.

10.10 Nomádi

Náš sprievodca Zanbalzand je príjemný človek a vie dobre po rusky. Spolu so šoférom tvoríme siedmi osádku džípu a uháňame na sever ku bralám Bayandzagu pátrať po dinosauroch. Večer medzi dunami nájdeme tri jurty a žiadame o nocľah. Usmiati mongoli práve doja kozy a ľavy, chlapci uväzujú kone a ľavy potom, ako sa vrátili z ďalekej celodennej paše. Keď dobytok spásie trávu asi v okruhu 10-20 km, mongoli zbalia jurty a presťahujú celý tábor 20-30 km ďalej, podmienkou je vždy blízkosť studne. Na novom mieste zostanú tri až osem týždňov, sťahovanie trvá najviac jeden deň.

10.11 Bajandzag

Ráno si skúšame jazdu na ľavách, vypadáme komicky, lebo ľavy si robia čo sa im chce, neposlúchajú a Mongoli sa smejú. Naše pátranie po dinosauroch pokračuje v oblasti tektonickej poruchy tvoriacej bralá Bajandzagu. Je to dosť zúfalý nápad, v tomto nekonečnom priestore sa to podobá hľadaniu tej povestnej ihly v kope sena, aj Zanbalzand sa len usmieva. Ale Jano je borec. Má to. Najprv len pár úlomkov, akoby z porcelánu, a potom celé vajce. Hniezdo plné vajec. Od chvíle, keď sa na svetlo sveta cez ich škrupinu vyklovali malí škaredí Protoceratopovia, ubehlo závatných deväťdesiat miliónov rokov. Naše paleontologický program sa plní nad očakávanie. Ešte to nejako dostať domov.

10.12 Dobrú chuť, rýchle nohy

Celý ďalší deň ideme krajinou fatamorgán, nechce sa veriť, že ilúzia je taká dokonalá. Deväťkrát potlačíš zmysly rozumom, na desiaty aj tak naletíš. Potom už neveríš naozaj ničomu a môže sa ti stať, že prejdeš okolo skutočnej vody, ale neuveríš tomu. Okrem jedného auta nám počas dňa robia spoločnosť len prchajúce zemné veverice a občas vyplašíme stáda antilop a gaziel. Ľudí je málo. Neskoro večer dostávame defekt. Mongoli takéto maličkosti opravujú na mieste, konkrétne diera na duši sa zatavuje pomocou dvoch drôtov a elektrického skratu na autobaterii, dnes je už ale neskoro a tak čakáme do rána a spíme pri aute. Ako rozbaľujeme stany, prichádzajú chlapi z neďalekých jurt a nevychádzajú z úžasu. Posadajú si okolo a čumia na nás ako na kozmonautov. Obdivujú konštrukciu stanov, ešusy aj ruksaky. Vrcholom predstavenia je plynový varič a varenie instantného pudingu. Príjeme na ráno ich pozvanie. Sú to lovci svišťov, okrem tradičného chovu dobytká poľujú na vypasené svište, ktoré sú tu permanentne premnožené. Je dobré držať sa od nich (svišťou) čo najďalej, pretože prenášajú čierny mor. To však nemá vplyv na ich kvalitnú kožušinu a tak nebezpečný a zakázaný obchod kvitne. Svište sú prefikane a tak sa na lov používa prevlek - čiapka s imitáciou svištej hlavy a akási chlpatá vábnička. Celé hodiny leží lovec nepohnute na postriežke s flintou namierenou na diery v zemi až pískajúce chlpaté chúďa oklame a pošle ho olovenou guľou do večných svištích lovíšť. Jurta je plná trofejí, čierny mor nikoho nevzrušuje. V tej istej jurte aj raňajujeme. V Mongolsku sa nepatrí odmietnuť, treba aspoň ochutnať. Vareného svišťa a čosi ako staré palacinky hojne zapijame kumysom. Dobrú chuť, rýchle nohy.

10.13 Džingisove mesto

V centrálnom Mongolsku kedysi dávno dal na základe veštby Chán Džingis postaviť veľkolepé sídlo svojho impéria - Karakorum. Jeho sláva však pominula a z bohatých chrámov nezostal kameň na kameni. Dnes už len dve kamenné korytnačky pripomínajú zašlú slávu. Mali za úlohu strážiť mesto pred záplavami, no pred záplavou čínskych vojakov mesto neboli schopné uchrániť. Dnes na týchto historických miestach stojí lamaistický kláštor Erdene Zuu. Trvalo 300 rokov kým tisíce mníchov vybudovali takmer stovku chrámov a svätýň, a stačil jeden nálet bombardéra v rukách boľševických šialencov a všetko sa obrátilo na prach. V tejto dobe stalinistického temna zahynuli v ruských gulagoch desaťtisíce mníchov a zo sedemsto kláštorov zostali len ruiny.

Dnes sa pokúšajú lámovia vrátiť kláštorom život. My máme šťastie byť pri takomto novuzrození a trochu pomôcť. Chrám Lavrin bol v čase nášho príchodu tesne pred dokončením. Ponúkne nám pomoc (podarilo sa to iba vďaka ruštine) a za to máme nocľah a trochu jedla. Na tretí deň sa už od rána schádzajú lámovia z celej krajiny a rodičia novicov prinášajú modlitebné sútry. Divákov je málo, vzťah Mongolov k náboženstvu je dnes už len vlažný. Obrad trvá niekoľko hodín, monotónna modlitba je čas od času spetrovaná hlasným trúbením na lastúry a údermi ohlušujúceho gongu. Cez prestávku sa pije vo veľkom množstve kumys. Treba správne odhadnúť, kedy sa ten okamžik blíži a taktne sa vzdialiť, pretože do kamaráta Ondra raz mnísi naliali celý liter. Po skončení modlitieb mladý lámovia Sodzorig a Gansuh pripravujú oltárne obety na ďalší deň. Niekoľko sto mosadzných kalíškov plnia vodou, kadidlom, sviečkami, múkou a akosi tajomnou monštranciou. Počet a usporiadanie kalíškov je veľmi komplikované a každý deň iné, obaja sa ho naučili na lamaistických štúdiách v Indii a v Ulánbátare. Doviaľajú, aby som im pomáhal a môžem vyťahovať svoju Prácticu, hoci to lámovia nemajú radi. Pri fotení mám ale zmiešané pocity a akosi sa neviem tešiť - sú to prvé fotky z tohto chrámu, čo je nesporne pre amatéra úspech, ale nie je to zároveň aj svätokrádež? Budhizmus (lamaizmus ako jedna jeho forma) tvrdí, že fotenie oberá mníchov o dušu. Myslíme si o tom čo chceme, oni tomu veria a my asi nemáme právo im túto vieru zosmiešňovať. Veď práve publicita a veľký turistický boom ničia tieto izolované a tajomné miesta. Zostalo ich na svete už len málo, raz asi aj oni podľahnú konzumu a komercii, ale mám právo tomu pomáhať? Kritizujem nemeckých turistov ako si za pre nich smiešnu sumu natáčajú "originálnych" domorodcov kdesi na Papui, ale nezačalo to kedysi dávno aj tam podobne? Jediné riešenie nachádzam pre seba v tom, že nebudem povrchný a tomu čo fotím sa vynasazím aj rozumieť, správať sa v takom prostredí podľa ich pravidiel a čo najmenej meniť beh vecí, byť pozorovateľ, ale neupútať na seba pozornosť a nikomu nevnučovať svoj životný štýl. Proste byť pokorným pútnikom hľadajúcim čosi viac ako len povrchné dojmy.

10.14 Epilóg

Rozlúčka s Karakorumom aj s Mongolskom je smutnoveselá. V autobuse s nami okrem piatich živých baranov a tisíc litrov kumysu cestuje Darinka Rolincová na pestrofarebnom plagáte s motorkou, prilepenom na plexiskle za šoférom. Po stranách sú obrázky žien v liptovských krojoch s veľkonočnými vajíčkami. Dve pekné dievčatká, asi ročné dvojčičky s peknými zapletenými copmi sa pri cikaní menia na chlapcov. Už sa nám to ani nezdá také šialené. Cestou sa do autobusu dostane od nemeckých dobrovoľníkov 50 výtlačkov Sv. Evanjelia podľa Jána v mongolčine. Desať minút celý autobus číta, a na dvadsať minút sa už všetky váľajú po dlážke. Na týždňovú cestu domov si v Ulánbátare kupujeme poľskú minerálku a na českej ambasáde získame staré noviny. Pred odchodom kupujem v staničnom obchode chleba, predavačka ma nie a nie pochopiť, tak na ňu na záver vybehnem dosť hrubo po slovensky. "Che mi luto, ale uz neni chleb...", hovorí rečou, ktorú sa naučila kedysi dávno počas štúdií v Liptovskom Hrádku... Ešte v Ulánbátare na stanici na nás podnapitý blbec vyťahne revolver a chce doláre. Spočiatku to vyzerá zle, no celé sa nám to akosi nezdá a keď konečne dotyčného pána odzbrojíme a vyhodíme z vlaku, hodíme za ním aj plastickú atrapu, čo nám tak nahnala strach. Horšie je to o tri dni v ruskom Tumene, pri incidente s policajtmí v civile, čo mi chcú ukradnúť fotoaparát dostáva kamarát Jončo zásah slzným plynom do očí a tri hodiny na nás strúha bolestivé grimasy. Takmer presne sedem dní vo vlaku a zase je tu "tí-di-da-dá-Bratislava-hlavná-vystupovať..."

11 Traveler diaries

11.1 Mongolia

When we entered Mongolia at about 02:00 AM Mongolian time, we were immediately confronted with the Mongolian army. About 50 men almost forced their way into our train. They were all wearing old costumes with giant red stars on their hats; an heritage of the communistic era? Anyway, they checked our cabins thoroughly and collected our passports. My father, still asleep, was left alone by the militias after we had showed them we carried no illegal objects with us.

The procedure didn't make us feel very welcome; we had to lift up all our stuff ourselves in the middle of the night and the militias only nodded. They seemed very angry with us, but we couldn't help being about four hours late either... We had expected a much more gently approach, as it is already a disgrace to wake up guests at 02:00 in the night to check their passports!!! After 90 minutes, our train left the border post. All tourists in our group were now fed up with border procedures and this disgraceful event was our first bad experience after St. Petersburg... Fortunately, this first meeting with Mongolia was not very representative for the country, as we noticed later.

We arrived in Ulaanbator, Mongolia's capitol, at 8:00 AM the next day. Our guide of the Altai travel service was waiting for us there (a great relieve after our experiences in St. Petersburg and Moscow) and, although we were warned for pickpockets, everything went as planned. Our bus drove us to our hotel, situated only 250 meters from the station!! We found out that Mongolians hate walking; they prefer driving cars or, whenever possible, horses.

The whole atmosphere here was different compared with Russia. Our guide and the locals were very friendly, everything went as planned and the service was perfect; no more lies through mismanagement.

After some time to refresh ourselves in the hotel, our bus drove us to the Ganden monastery. This Buddhist monastery in Ulaanbator is the third most important in Mongolia and is still in use. It contains the largest copper statue in the world; it's head is hardly visible from the ground!! As you enter the public temple, the atmosphere created by the smell of incense surrounds you and you feel discharged of sorrow in this holy religious shrine. It's like entering a gothic medieval catholic cathedral.

Next to the temple is the monastery complex itself, containing several buildings. All buildings are filled with religious signs.

For instant: The dots on the buildings are always in holy quantities. After we had walked through the complex, we went back to the bus to go to Bogdo Khan's palace in Ulaanbator.

This 'palace' isn't as spectacular as the Ganden monastery or Russian palaces. In fact, it's a decayed complex of low wooden structures; more like a western amusement park. I guess you need to know the historic background behind Bogdo Khan to understand the importance of this site. By the way; I don't have any photo's of the palace, because I don't think it's worthy to buy a camera-ticket for it.

We then drove to the center of Ulaanbator; it's Russian designed main square and General Department Store. I noticed that these squares are the same in all countries once under Soviet influence; they are all mirrored to the Red Square and most of them contain mausolea like Lenins. I guess the people of Ulaanbator don't really like this square, which is perhaps why it has decayed so much. Anyway, we had a look around and then went to the GDS of Ulaanbator. The prices in this store are very high compared to other Mongolian shops, which is why most of the customers here are foreign (??).

By the way although we saw people at the Mongolian bank carrying over ten million Tugrik (ca. \$10.000), Mongolia is still a developing country.

Ulaanbator city didn't impress us very much, but it didn't disappoint us either, because some Mongolians we had met in the train already told us Ulaanbator is little more than a dirty, decayed factory-city. The city is in sharp contrast with the beautiful environment surrounding it and it's friendly citizens...

That evening, our group visited the Ulaanbator Theatre. Unfortunately, I don't have any pictures of the show, but it was worth visiting very, very much!! The only negative thing was that two seats collapsed under the weight of two people in our group... Anyway, we were driven back to our Hotel to watch some television. I cached a fragment with several teams wrestling for survivance. A few hundred men, divided in 4 teams, ran in the battle field. They then searched for an opponent and went wrestling. A referee decided which man had lost and had to leave the field. After about 90 min., only 10 men were still standing. The red team won the match after they had defeated the last blue warrior...

CNN then showed us a very happy Lance Armstrong, he had just won the Tour de France. My father, a cyclist-fan, seemed to be just as excited about this victory as our Mongolian viewers were about the red victory over blue... I guess it are two different cultures...

The next day, we were driven outside Ulaanbator into Mongolia's great nature. We were very excited, because some Mongolians we had met in the train told us that Ulaanbator isn't very characteristic for Mongolia's nature, which is well-known for its beauty. They proved right, as soon as the endless apartment-blocks disappeared after only 10 minutes of driving. The city is very sharply bordered; there are no lightly populated suburbs surrounding it and after you have passed the sign 'you are leaving Ulaanbator', the landscape is empty. Camel drivers, yurts and herts are the only artificial elements in the landscape. Traffic is very low here (both in speed and density) because the roads are so poor that our driver often decided to drive next to the road, using it only as a way of navigation... Anyway, the nature is beautiful and I made a lot of pictures during several stops.

The blue flagged stone pile on the pictures below is a holy religious shrine. Walking around it eight times brings luck... I also cached another rather unusual scene on camera; a motor-driver with his goat as his passenger!!!!

We then arrived at the second most important monastery in Mongolia, just outside Ulaanbator. This monastery is not as busy as Ganden monastery in Ulaanbator. The site consists of a national nature museum, a wooden 'restaurant', some stone ruins, some ancient paintings/sculptures and a building with some Buddhist signs/sculptures/paintings. These things are scattered over an huge land area, which is surrounded by empty nature as far as the horizon reaches.

The first objects we noticed as we left the bus were some stone sculpture, similar to those on eastern-island (South-America). Our guide told us these holy stones were sculptured by ancient Mongolians in the first/second millenium BC !!! We were astonished that these stones were standing here without any protection against human influence! Anyway, we continued our tour and I noticed that the very rarely seen Edelweiss (in Europe) was growing everywhere! It turned out that Edelweiss is a very common flower in Mongolia and that it isn't protected by any regulation. Still, we didn't need to take this lyrical, famous and valuable flower back to Europe.

The Mongolian Nature is truly beautiful, especially the skies with its clouds! As you can see on the photo's, the clouds fill up the sky in a beautiful way!

After a short walk in the hot sun, we arrived at the nature museum. This 'field' museum is situated in a very small, decayed building. Still, it has a collection that would provoke jealousy by many European nature musea... Highlights of the collection : a gigantic bird of prey and some rather impressive skulls.

We then went for a long walk through the Mongolian nature (in the hot, hot sun) to visit the monastery itself, situated on a hill... Some people in our group had to stay below because of this... After about half an hour of walking, we arrived at the monastery. This small building contains some Buddhist images/sculptures and masks, but not as many as Ganden monastery. The site gains its importance purely through ancient artifacts and ruins situated here. We climbed higher and passed a ruin of what once was the main monastery (before Mongol communist destroyed the site and killed the monks in the 1930's).

We continued our climb and passed some rock-painting dating back as far as between the 12th and 16th century!!! These very important artifacts were, like the stone sculptures, barely protected! I guess I can't describe them all (view the photo's).

Although our guide had told us it is dangerous to climb any higher, we continued climbing and discovered some other artifacts before going down all the way to have a lunch at the wooden building.

It was getting late and time for us to head back to Ulaanbator. On our way, we met a native cameldriver, which was considered worth stopping for. While the other tourists were talking with the cameldriver, I discovered a strange stone breaking the rhythm of the steps' landscape. It appeared to be a memorial sign for two European bikers who died on that particular place during their holiday in an accident. But the inscription was very hard to read and until today, I still can't be sure...

The next day, we headed for the mirage tourist camp near Ulaanbator. We would stay there for two days and we had a great time driving horses and discovering the environment. Driving an horse in Mongolia is very different compared with driving horse in Europe. Mongolia has much more open space, which means that you can pick any direction and drive in that direction without finding any obstacles like roads, rivers, trees, etc on your way. Secondly, you won't find any other natural obstacles here (like dead trees, ditches, large hills, etc.). In Europe, you would have to be very, very careful to make sure your horse doesn't get hurt...

Anyway, the 'Mirage tourist camp' consists of several yurts, all with electricity. The camp itself has toilets/showers and a dining room. Food was prepared in a traditional way; a big milkcan was put on a fire. It was filled in several layers; first some stones, then potatoes, then some mutton (not the supermarket stuff), then carrots and finally mutton again. Between each layer more stones were added. The milkcan was tightly closed by a towel. After an hour or so, we heard a 'big bang', which indicated that dinner was to be served... I have to agree this dinner tasted O.K.!

That night, we slept for the first time in a yurt, which isn't as small on the inside as it looks on the outside. Actually, it is large enough for eight people to live in and I think a lot of people in poor suburban areas (like those in NY, Johannesburg or Bombay) would not have any trouble at all switching places with native Mongolians...

We went driving horses again the next day. Some Mongolians (aged somewhere between 8 and 12) guided us and they were more adept in driving horse than we were! These people are almost literally born on an horse; driving an horse is the same in Mongolia as driving a bicycle in The Netherlands; a form of life. We also caught a fragment of a big horserace, a spectacular sight!, before we went back to Ulaanbator.

We went back to the hotel, etc. The next day was the last day for us in beautiful Mongolia and also our only unplanned day here. I had asked our guide two days earlier for the possibilities to travel to KharKorum, the ancient capital of Mongolia (in the era after the great Chenchis Khan died) and also the most important Buddhist monastery in Mongolia. But she told us it is high-on-impossible to visit the place. You would need at least a week to get there by car and the plane only goes there twice a week... So we went exploring Ulaanbator again, but this time without guidance. We visited the National Museum of Nature and the National Museum of History. These museums are both worth visiting very much; not only because their collections are quite big, but also because these collections on Mongolia are unique in the world.

After a long but interesting day, our group went to the hotel for the last time. The next day, we gathered at Ulaanbator Main Station to continue our great train voyage.

We had learned a lot about Mongolia, it's culture, it's people and it's landscape in the past week. The country is worth a visit if you're interested in nature or culture. But don't stay in Ulaanbator for more than a week. Ulaanbator is not a very interesting city to stay in and when your hotel is booked in Ulaanbator, you can't leave, because it isn't possible to see other things in the country in less than about 3 days for every event you'd like to see...

Off we were again at 8:30 AM Ulaanbator Time, which is equal to Beijing time. We pick up our trainlife (reading books, listening music, talking with other tourists) again and after an hour or so, it seemed as if we hadn't left the train at all.

Mongolian/Chinese trains are similar to Russian; they even make the same noise at the same rhythm and speed!

Anyway, I already discussed trainlife in the previous chapter, so I'll stick to the facts from now on. We passed several small and decayed villages. These villages looked awful! They consist of huge concrete blocks, which are randomly placed in the landscape! They are not even connected by a road or something like that! It seems as if these villages were abandoned a long time ago and forgotten by the world.

In the evening, we were entering the Gobi desert. This desert is said to be the world's largest pile of sand. I didn't notice much of it, as we passed it at night and everyone was still exhausted because of the past few days.

In the evening we crossed the Mongol-Chinese border. The Chinese militias were much more friendly to us than the Russian or Mongolian had been during the last two border crossings. The procedures went smoothly and fast; after only about an hour of waiting, we entered China. Once there, we were driven in a giant shed. The whole train was lifted up and its wheels were replaced by others (China's railway has different standards than Russia's and Mongolia's).

That night in the Gobi desert, we left our window wide open to get some fresh air (the temperature had risen till over 30 degrees Celsius in the train). It proved to be a mistake as a cold breeze woke us all at 02:00 AM... We had forgotten that the temperature in a desert drops severely over night...

Anyway, we had entered China, so the next episode of this story begins...

12 Itineraries of various travel agencies

12.1 *Normandic Expeditions*

I was born to be an explorer. There was never any decision to make. I couldn't do anything else and be happy.

Roy Chapman Andrews in This Business of Exploring (1935)

It was surely with this thought in mind that the rather flamboyant Roy Chapman Andrews (who was said to later serve as the inspiration for the movie character Indiana Jones) set out in the early 1920s to explore the uncharted wilderness of the Gobi Desert. During his first expedition to the Gobi, his team from the American Museum of Natural History stumbled across what Andrews christened, the Flaming Cliffs.. He wrote in his diary, . From our tents, we looked down into a vast pink basin, studded with giant buttes like strange beasts, carved from sandstone. There appears to be medieval castles with spires and turrets, brick red in the evening light, colossal gateways, walls and ramparts.. It was here that Roy Chapman Andrews and his team made some of the most significant paleontological discoveries to date, including the first nest of dinosaur eggs the world had ever seen.

Roy Chapman Andrews was an adventurer and wrote a number of books about his expeditions, many of which inspired us at Nomadic Expeditions who grew up dreaming of the great Gobi and its incredible dinosaur fossils. With this same spirit of exploration, we have created our Active Adventures to follow in the footsteps of the great explorers, but while still allowing an individual sense of discovery. In this way, we too can gaze upon the castles and turrets of the Flaming Cliffs as if on an inaugural expedition.

As explorers ourselves, we at Nomadic Expeditions continue to find exciting new firsts for our travelers and to create definitive expeditions that explore valleys and cliffs, rivers and mountains, where no other companies go. Join us as we trek through the dramatic highlands of Tibet, kayak on Mongolia's stunning Lake Hovsgol, explore Nepal's grasslands astride elephants, and of course, traverse the vast Gobi Desert.

- [From Yak to Kayak](#)
- [Horsetrekking in Arhangai](#)
- [Northern Mongolia on Horseback](#)
- [Whitewater Canoeing on Mongolia's Chuluut River](#)
- [Adventure Trekking in the Altai Mountains](#)
- [Gobi Camel Trek](#)
- [Trek to Tsengle Mountain](#)
- [Trekking in Mongolia's Heartland: Monasteries and Nomads](#)
- [Temples and Trekking in Tibet](#)
- [Annapurna Sanctuary Trek](#)
- [Dinosaurs of the Gobi](#)
- [Epic Mongolian Overland Adventure](#)
- [Golden Eagles of the Kazakhs](#)

From Yak to Kayak

Mongolia's landscapes range from vast steppe, rolling endlessly toward the horizon, to snow-capped mountains bordering alpine lakes, to towering sandstone cliffs. Experience the hospitality of Mongolia's nomads as you explore the contrasting landscapes of the country from the Gobi Desert in the south to the vast central grasslands to stunning Lake Hovsgol in the far north. Begin your journey at Hustain Nuruu National Reserve, located in the Mongolian steppe and home to the only true species of wild horse in the world. Next, visit what scientists believe is the cleanest fresh-water lake on the planet, Lake Hovsgol. From the lake, travel to the legendary Gobi Desert, where you will explore its diverse landscapes, from red-sandstone cliffs to green mountain valleys. This trip is an excellent overview of Mongolia and a perennial favorite. If you have a few extra days, you may wish to take advantage of the "Mongolian Vistas II" itinerary, which also includes Kharakhorum and Erdene Zuu Monastery.

Trip Summary:

12 Days

4 nights in hotels

4 nights in ger camps

3 night camping

Day hikes, kayaking, camel trekking, yak carts, horseriding

Lake Hovsgol " Gobi " Gorkhi-Terelj National Park

Optional extension to Bayan Ulgii.

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,350 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$510

Dates: August 4-15

Horsetrekking in Arhangai

Discover the remarkable beauty of Arkhangai, known as the "Switzerland" of Mongolia as we horsetrek through this beautiful grass steppe region, stopping to visit local families who herd horses. We'll camp along the shores of many of the area's rivers with the opportunity to hike and explore on foot. Our final destination will be Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake National Park. Completely undeveloped, the park contains one of the most beautiful lakes in Mongolia, Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur, which was formed thousands of years ago when lava from a nearby volcano flowed into the Terk River creating a natural dam.

Trip Summary:

13 Days

2 nights in hotels

2 nights in ger camps

8 nights camping

Tsetserleg o Tamir River o Chuluut River o Khorgo-

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake National Park

Optional extension to Bayan-Ulgii

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,250 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$480

Dates: August 15-27

Northern Mongolia on Horseback

Designed for the more experienced horserider, the highlight of this journey will be visiting Tsaatans, members of the Turkic-speaking Tuvinian ethnic group known as Dukha. Tsaatan families herd domesticated reindeer in Hovsgol Province, using the reindeer primarily for transportation and milk, and live in teepees similar to those once used by Native Americans. Traveling

through the beautiful Khoridal Saridag Mountains, our lake, known as Mongolia's "dark blue pearl."

horsetrek will end at Lake Hovsgol, a crystal-clear alpine

Trip Summary:

15 Days

2 nights in hotels

2 nights in ger camps

10 night camping

Hustain Nuruu National Reserve " Rinchenhumble " Lake Hovsgol " Khoridal Saridag Mountains

Optional extension to Bayan Ulgii

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,675 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$550

Dates: July 25-August 8

Whitewater Canoeing on Mongolia's Chuluut River

Described as "the best multi-day whitewater canoe trip" our participants had ever experienced, the quality of the Chuluut river trip was considered "superior to that of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho." In addition to the thrill of running a river that few westerners have ever seen, we will have the chance for many memorable encounters with nomadic herders and horsemen. Driving overland in jeeps across the rolling steppe to our put-in will give us our first taste of the unspoiled beauty of Mongolia's landscapes and the incredible hospitality of her people. Dramatic highlights of the journey include visiting Buyandelgeruulekh Monastery, at its height, home to almost 1,000 monks, and picturesque Zayayn Gegeenii Temple, situated on the hill overlooking the monastery. We will also explore Erdene Zuu Monastery, situated next to the ancient site of Kharakhorum, the ancient capital of Chingis Khan. Surrounded by 108 magnificent stupas, Erdene Zuu has been a place of Buddhist activity for more than 1,000 years and is reputedly constructed from the ruins of Kharakhorum

Trip Summary:

15 Days

3 nights in hotels

2 nights in gers

9 night camping

Class II interspersed with Class III whitewater canoeing

Chuluut River " Buyandelgeruulekh Monastery " Zayayn Gegeenii Temple " Kharakhorum " Erdene Zuu Monastery

Optional extension to the Gobi

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,750 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$575

Dates: July 18-August 1

Adventure Trekking in the Altai Mountains

Imagine exploring the mystical Altai Mountains in Western Mongolia. One of the last true wilderness areas of Asia, the stunning beauty of the magnificent Altai Mountains-Mongolia's highest-with several peaks reaching upwards of 14,000 feet, will be the backdrop for our extraordinary adventure. The backcountry of western Mongolia is still relatively unexplored and this thrilling expedition offers a remarkable experience for active travelers. Amidst spectacular snowcapped peaks, trek through some of Mongolia's most wild and inaccessible regions. From pristine lakes teeming with fish to meadows strewn with fuchsia and topaz wildflowers to magnificent alpine scenery, our itinerary provides a rare glimpse of some of Mongolia's most remote and uncharted areas. A highlight of any trip to this region is the chance to interact with local Kazakh families and learn about their unique culture which has been preserved over the ages. Though their pastoral-nomadic lifestyle is similar to that of the Mongolians, these nomads are predominantly Moslem.

Trip Summary:

11 Days

3 nights in hotels

2 nights in ger camps

5 nights camping

4-6 hours of hiking per day

Altitudes from 4,000 to 9,000 feet

Ulgii " Segsei Valley " Tolbo Lake

Optional extension to the Gobi

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,425 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$445

Dates: August 1-15

Gobi Camel Trek

The Gobi-the very name evokes images of Mongolia at its most wild. This dramatic desert has attracted explorers and

adventurers since Roy Chapman Andrews and his team from the American Museum of Natural History discovered the first nest of dinosaur eggs the world had ever seen. This invigorating journey was designed for trekking aficionados to experience the desert as never before. Venturing into the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, we will trek and ride camels on the ancient routes of the desert through the canyons and cliffs of the Gobi. Camping in the shadow of the Gobi Altai Mountains, we will experience the wash of purple, rose, and heather that define the desert's skyline at dusk. Cultural encounters include visiting with isolated families that raise their herds and live in the semi-arid desert environment. Any expedition to Mongolia is extraordinary but we believe that our Gobi Camel Trek is one of our most thrilling and provides some of the most exceptional experiences to be had in Mongolia.

Trip Summary:

15 Days
3 nights in hotels
4 nights in gers
7 night camping
4-6 hours of hiking per day
Post-trip Extension to Bayan-Ulgii

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,550 per person based on double occupancy
Single Supplement: \$585

Dates: August 29-September 12

Trek to Tsengle Mountain

A true adventure, this epic odyssey to a land of horse-mounted nomads, Moslem mosques, dramatic landscapes and Golden Eagles, will allow a handful of travelers to experience the wilds of Mongolia's Far West. Our goal will be to reach the base of the Tsengel Khairkan Mountain, trekking past ponderous mountains, fast moving streams, and verdant grasslands. During our travels, we will stop to visit with Kazakh families, many of which hunt with Golden Eagles, and Urianhai families, a minority tribe of Mongolians who are renowned for their archery abilities. The families in this isolated area follow the traditional ways and we will be welcomed into their gers for "milk tea." Our journey will also take us past ancient Turkish "stone men," a reminder of Mongolia's rich history, and Moslem burial tombs made from adobe with a distinct architectural style. Opening a window on a world quite unlike our own, this expedition offers active travelers the chance to explore the stunning beauty and cultural highlights of this remote region.

Trip Summary:

10 Days
2 nights in hotels
2 nights in gers
5 night camping
4-6 hours of hiking per day
Ulgii " Segsei Valley " Tsengle Khairkan Mountain
Optional extension to the Gobi

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,600 per person based on double occupancy
Single Supplement: \$435

Dates: August 22-September 1

Trekking in Mongolia's Heartland: Monasteries and Nomads

Woven through the nomadic culture is a rich Tibetan-Buddhist tradition with elements of ancient Shamanist practices still evident. Although many Buddhist monasteries were destroyed and religious expression was severely curtailed during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, Mongolia's spirituality persisted and a significant resurgence of Buddhism began in 1990 when Mongolia became a democracy. Erdene Zuu Monastery was built in 1586 on the base of Kharakorum, the former site of Chingis Khan's capital. This area of the steppe has always been auspicious for Mongolians and it is here that we'll begin our fabulous trek through the central grasslands of Mongolia. Trekking 6 to 10 miles per day, we will travel along the beautiful Orkhon River, passing Tuhum Monastery, en route to Orkhon waterfall, a stunning waterfall formed by a series of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions approximately 20,000 years ago. Camping under Mongolia's vast skies, we'll visit with nomadic families who offer tea and friendship to passing travelers. An excellent introduction to Mongolia's nomads and Buddhist traditions, this moderate hike highlights the cultural and natural gems of this region.

Trip Summary:

13 Days
3 nights in hotels
2 nights in gers

7 night camping 3-5 hours of hiking per day, pack animals carry supplies
 Kharakhorum " Erdene Zuu Monastery " Tuhum Monastery " Orkhon Waterfall
 Optional extension to the Gobi

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,150 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$445

Dates: June 23-July 4

Temples and Trekking in Tibet

We will seek to gain an insider's look at the Tibetan's intellectual and spiritual life, and to understand in much greater depth what it means to be a Buddhist. We will thus go on an intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage of sorts, one that requires no particular creed nor religious affiliation. Known as the "vision lake" of the Dalai Lamas, Lhamo La Tso is the most important oracle lake of Tibet, holding the life-force of the protectress Pelden Lhamo, who is identified with the life-spirit of Tibet and the Dalai Lamas. We will make the pilgrimage trek to Lhamo La Tso, similar to Dalai Lamas who often journeyed to this lake to seek visions regarding their future and circumstances of their death. It is here, too, that close attendants of Dalai Lamas have come to divine the whereabouts of incarnations of the Dalai Lamas upon their death. We will also trek to Chökorgye Monastery, ruins of an extensive monastery complex which sit dramatically in the middle of the wide, grassy plain of Gyal Metoktang. Built in 1509 by the Second Dalai Lama when His Holiness had a hermitage and meditation cave at this site, Chökorgye was one of the most important monasteries in Tibet, housing 500 monks at its peak. This journey will also take the adventurous traveler to some of the most exquisite temples, monasteries and bazaars in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa and Kathmandu, her flamboyant counterpart in Nepal.

Trip Summary:

18 Days

12 nights in hotels

5 nights camping

4-6 hours of hiking per day

Kathmandu " Lhasa " Olka Valley

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,950 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$670

Dates:

May 30-June 15

Annapurna Sanctuary Trek

Lying in the heart of the legendary Himalayas is the sublime Annapurna, a range of glaciated-mountain peaks rising upwards of 27,000 feet. We will uncover a world of breathtaking mountain panorama on a relatively short trek. The heart of the Annapurna Massif is reached after only 7 days of hiking on a spectacular trail no higher than 13,500 feet. En route to the high mountains and glaciers, we will encounter villages of the Gurung people, who hold this region sacred, as well as pass through picturesque bamboo forests, rice fields and rhododendron pastures. Arriving at the Machapuchare Base Camp, we will enjoy the splendor of the Sanctuary by taking leisurely hikes in the area or simply relaxing in this dramatic panorama of snow-capped peaks and flowing glaciers. This incredible journey will begin and conclude in Kathmandu, the colorful city of magnificent temples, flamboyant bazaars, and exquisite cuisine.

Trip Summary:

15 Days

4 nights in hotels/lodges

10 nights camping

4-6 hours of hiking per day,

Kathmandu " Pokhara " Ghandrung " Chomro " Machapuchare Camp " Khuldi " Dhampus

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$1,950 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$350

Dates: April 24-May 8

Dinosaurs of the Gobi

Have you ever dreamed of discovering a dinosaur fossil? Join noted paleontologist, Dr. Philip Currie, for the trip of a lifetime to the remote fossil beds of the Nemegt Basin and the cliffs of Hermyn Tsav, two of the world's premier fossil sites located in Mongolia. Working under the auspices of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences with the guidance of Dr. Currie, Curator of Dinosaurs at the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Canada, expedition members will have the opportunity to prospect for and excavate fossils from the legendary Gobi desert, home to some of the most exciting finds of the century. The Gobi is considered by many to be the "Mecca" of the fossil world, and due to its remote location and difficult terrain, the desert is still rich with fossils recording the Late Cretaceous Period. Past members of our paleontological expeditions have made significant finds such as a huge Tarborsaurus jaw (a relative of Tyrannosaurus Rex), dinosaur eggs, Velociraptor claws, and Protoceratops

skulls. In this rich desert setting, travelers will feel like explorers from a bygone age as they excavate fossils under the supervision of Dr. Currie and Dr. Badamgarav, one of Mongolia's leading paleontologists.

Trip Summary:

15 Days

3 nights in hotels

1 night camping

Extensive overland drive; prospecting for fossils in the field; optional hikes

Flaming Cliffs " Hongoryn Els " Nemeegt Basin " Hermyn Tsav

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$3,965 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$570

Dates: September 5-19

Epic Mongolian Overland Adventure

Heartwarming encounters with nomadic families and an appreciation for the vast and everchanging landscape make traveling overland through Mongolia as enjoyable as reaching the destination. This epic off-road adventure will traverse the entire country from north to south using 4-wheel-drive Land Rover Defenders, ultimately reaching the legendary Gobi, near Mongolia's southern border with China. We will journey from stunning Lake Hovsgol in the far north, where the surrounding forests form the southern edge of the Siberian taiga, through the vast grass steppe dotted with nomadic families' gers and roaming herds, until we reach the dramatic sunsets of the Gobi. Our extensive route is one of the most ambitious off-road expeditions ever undertaken in Mongolia and we will encounter undiscovered regions of Mongolia where the rest of the world seems a million miles and a few hundred years away. Accommodations will range from our own private gers to our tent camps where we can enjoy the incredibly clear and starry night skies of Mongolia.

Trip Summary:

15 Days

4 nights in hotels

5 nights in gers

5 nights camping

Extensive driving; optional afternoon hikes

Lake Hovsgol " Kharakhorum " Ongiyn Hiid " Gobi Desert

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$2,590 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$615

Dates: August 22-September 5

Golden Eagles of the Kazakhs

Imagine riding across snow-covered mountains with Kazakhs as they hunt with trained Golden Eagles. Specially timed during the winter, this incredible trip will take us to Mongolia's far western province, Bayan-Ulgii, during the season when Kazakhs, in their ancestral way, follow tracks of small rabbits and fox in the snow. Riding out to the mountain tops each day, we will be introduced to the Kazakh customs and lifestyle. Kazakhs ride dressed in their traditional dark coats and scarlet hats with eagles perched on their arms. Weighing as much as fifteen pounds, these magnificent birds are trained from a young age to respond to hand signals and return to their owners after capturing small game. Kazakhs return the eagles to the wild at the age of seven, when they still have half their life span remaining.

Based at the Kazakh's hunting camp, we will sleep in traditional Kazakh gers, which are unique in their design and construction, heated with a large wood-burning stove. In the evenings, we'll learn traditional Kazakh songs as we gather around the place of honor - the Kazakh "table" - and enjoy tea and bortdsig (fried cakes).

Trip Summary:

8 Days

4 nights in hotels

3 nights in ger camps

Light walking, horse riding

Ulgii " Segsei Valley " Tsengle Mountain

Price:

10-15 travelers: \$1,850 per person based on double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$360

Dates: March 7-17, November 7-17

12.2 Samar Magic Tours

12.2.1 Nature Adventure Travel

Specialty Categories: Nature, National Parks, Fishing, Camping, Horse riding, Wild Horses, Nomadic Family

Destination : Mongolia

Included Meals Abbreviations: (B) Breakfast (L) Lunch (D) Dinner

Airfare Included: No

Number of Participants: Minimum: 2

Tour Length: 11 days / 10 nights

The tourist seasonal: May, June, July, August, September, and October.

Tour Summary:

Mongolia, in beautiful natural locations, with comfortable gers (Mongolian felt tents) with beds and furniture, restaurant-ger only in Mongolia. No hotels, saunas or tennis courts-just nature!

Przewalski horses:

Przewalski horses have become extinct in the wild only recently, in the second half of the twentieth century. Happily, some horses did survive in zoos. After careful preparation and breeding the reintroduction of the Przewalski horses is made in the nineties in several Mongolian nature reserves. Up till now, only the reintroduction in the Hustain Nuruu Reserve seems to have been successful.

The Przewalski horse (*Equus przewalskii* Poliakov) or Takhi as the Mongolians name them are rather small, sturdy animals with a short, strong neck. They are sand-coloured all over except for a dark stripe running along the spine into the dark coloured tail, covered by light dockhairs. The nose is cream-coloured and the legs show zebra stripes. Their erect manes and tail are dark brown. The species was named after the man who rediscovered it in 1878, Colonel Nicolai Przewalski, is the last remaining wild horse species in the world.

Prehistoric drawings in caves in France and Spain show that these horses were hunted by primitive humans over 20,000 years ago. The earliest written reports of Przewalski horses date from the ninth century and in 1226 a herd of Przewalski horses is said to have caused Djingiz Chan to fall off his horse. For millennia these horses roamed the steppes of Europe and Asia.

THE HUSTAIN NURUU STEPPE

The steppe zone in Mongolia is located in between the forest zone / taiga in the north and the desert zone in the south, with two intermediary zones in between: the forest-steppe and the semi-desert, each with its own characteristic species.

In spring / summer beautiful flowers like iris, crocus, tulips etc. Show, but this beauty dries out quickly in the summer. The Hustain Nuruu Reserve (hustai is Mongolian for birch and nuruu means mountains) measures about 57,000 hectares, or including the bufferzone 120,000 ha., and is located on about 100 km west from the capital Ulaanbaatar.

GORKI-TERELJ NATIONAL PARK:

Formed in 1993, the National Park covers 2,864 square kilometres, is about 80km north-east of Ulaanbaatar.

Terelj is a picturesque place of high cliffs eroded in Mesozoic granites, creating a wonderful landscape of granite tors. Huge blocks of granite have been eroded by wind, rain, ice and natural acids into bizarre shapes, as if by some giant sculptor. To cater for visitors, there are a National ger tourists camps in beautiful natural locations, forests and the Terel river. Also the tourist can visit the nomadic families, horse or camel riding, fishing, hiking, trekking, exploration the nature and the wildlife.

Your Itinerary:

Day 1 Arrive in Ulaanbaatar (UB). Transfer to hotel. Visit the Central Sukh Bataar Square. 18:00-National concert. Overnight at Hotel.(D)

Day 2 Depart to Terelj National Park (2 hours). Transfer to the ger camp. Excursion. Overnight in ger.(B)(L)(D)

Day 3 Visits the Tortoise rock and the nomadic families. Enjoy the nature and horse riding (extra cost). Return to UB.

Overnight at Hotel.(B)(L)(D)

Day 4 Overland departure to Karakorum (the old capital of the great Mongolian Empire, 6 hours). Transfer to the ger tourist camp. Overnight in ger.(B)(L)(D)

Day 5 Visit the Erdene Zuu monastery. Afternoon: visits nomadic families and horses. Horse riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger camp.(B)(L)(D)

Day 6 Overland to the nomadic families. Horse treks (extra cost). Free time. Overnight in ger camp.(B)(L)(D)

Day 7 Overland to Bayangobi desert (3 hours). Overnight in ger camp.(B)(L)(D)

Day 8 Breakfast. Optional activities: Visits the dunes and the nomadic families. Hiking and camel riding, trekking, excursion. Ger tourist accommodation.(B)(L)(D)

Day 9 Overland to see the Wild Horses Hustain National Reserve (4 hours). Return to Ulaanbaatar. Transfer to the Genghis

Khaan ger camp.(B)(L)(D)

Day 10 Visits Gandan Buddhist monastery and the historic museum. Afternoon: visits Bogd Khan museum and the monument of Zaisan (General Panorama of the city). Some shopping.

Overnight in Genghis Khaan Ger camp.(B)(L)(D)

Day 11 Departure Mongolia

FIT = For Individule Tourist less 10 persons

GIT = Group tours including and over 10 persons

Tour Prices :

4-10 pax: US \$ 960 FIT

+11 pax: US \$ 860 GIT

Single Supplement: US \$39 per night at Flower Japanese or Bayangol Hotels

(minimum 2 persons, one overland free for every 12 paying clients)

(valid to 15 October)

Booking be made 10-15 days in advance or be subject to availability

Items included :

2 nights at hotel (double room) in UB with daily breakfast.

8 nights ger tourist camp accommodations.

9 days of Full board with one glass free drink.

1 day of only dinner (first day) and 1 day of only breakfast (last day).

Performance (concert) as listened in the program.

Entrance fees to "Terelj" National Park, to wild horses in Hustain Nuruu Reserve,

to Erdene Zuu monastery, to historic and Bogd Khan museums.

All transfers as listened.

Local english translator-guia.

Not included:

Drinks, Visa, Tips, Airport tax (\$ US 12), Own Expenses in / outside the hotel, horse or camel riding. The international or domestic airtickets. Single room supplement.

Please, for more information about the fare ticket from/to Beijing, the hotel accommodations in Beijing and for price of the Chinese program, email to us 25-30 days for the trip.

12.2.2 Mongolian Tour in the Steppes of Genghis Khan

Tour Duration: 15 Days

Destination : Mongolia

Specialty Categories: Festival Tours, Horse Racing, Arts Festivals

Season Start: Jun 30, 2000 Season End: Jul 14, 2000

Airfare Included: No

Number of Participants: Minimum: 2 pax

Included Meals Abbreviations: (B) Breakfast (L) Lunch (D) Dinner

Tour Summary:

National Holiday of Mongolia "Naadam Festival" (July 11-13)

Mongolian Festival Tours:

The "Naadam": The main events of the Naadam are three manly games: Wrestling, Horseracing, and Archery.

Gorki-Terelj: Formed in 1993, the National Park covers 2,864 square kilometres, is about 80km north-east of Ulaabaatar. Terej is a picturesque place of high cliffs eroded in Mesozoic granites, creating a wonderful landscape of granite tors. Huge blocks of granite have been eroded by wind, rain, ice and natural acids into bizarre shapes, as if by some giant sculptor.

To cater for visitors, there are a National ger tourists camps in beautiful natural locations, forests and the Terel river. Also the tourist can visit the nomadic families, horse or camel riding, fishing, hiking, trekking, exploration the nature and the wildlife.

We will overland to Karakorum (the first capital of Mongolian Empire). Visit Erdene Zuu monastery. Tour to observe the spectacular "Naadam Festival" in Ulaanbaatar and the wild horses in Hustain Nuruu.

Przewalski horses have become extinct in the wild only recently, in the second half of the twentieth century. Happily, some horses did survive in zoo's. After careful preparation and breeding the reintroduction of the Przewalski horses is made in the nineties in several Mongolian nature reserves. Up till now, only the reintroduction in the Hustain Nuruu Reserve seems to have been successful. The Przewalski horse (*Equus przewalskii* Poliakov) or Takhi as the Mongolians name them are rather small,

sturdy animals with a short, strong neck.

They are sand-coloured all over except for a dark stripe running along the spine into the dark coloured tail, covered by light dockhairs. The nose is cream-coloured and the legs show zebra stripes. Their erect manes and tail are dark brown. The species was named after the man who rediscovered it in 1878, Colonel Nicolai Przewalski, is the last remaining wild horse species in the world. Prehistoric drawings in caves in France and Spain show that these horses were hunted by primitive humans over 20,000 years ago. The earliest written reports of Przewalski horses date from the ninth century and in 1226 a herd of Przewalski horses is said to have caused Djingiz Chan to fall off his horse.

Tour price included:

Hotel accommodations (in double room) with daily breakfast in Ulaanbaatar.

All round trip transfers in Mongolia.

Local English Translator-guia.

Ger Accommodations in the countryside (Terelj National Park and Karakorum).

13 days of full board with one glass free drink.

1 day of only dinner (the first day) with one glass free drink and 1 day of only breakfast (the last day).

Entrance fee to National concert.

Entrance fees to the National parks of Mongolia, to the opening ceremony on July 11th of Naadam.

All trips are limited in the number of participants, thus applications are taken on a first come, first served basis.

If you have to cancel for any reason, notify us in writing and your money will be returned minus a service charge (\$ 140 USD).

No refunds within 14 days of trip departure.

Not included in this price:

Driks, visa, tips, optional programs, single supplement, horse treks, boating, camel riding, extra expenses, the domestic or international airtickets.

Your Itinerary

Day 1: 30 June Arrive in UB. Transfer to the Hotel. National concert. Dinner (D)

Day 2: 1 July Depart to Terelj National Park. Transfer to the ger camp. Overnight in ger tourist camp (B) (L) (D)

Day 3: 2 July Visits the Tortoise rock and the nomadic families there. Enjoy the nature and horse riding (extra cost). Return to UB. Overnight at hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 4: 3 July Overland to Karakorum (6 hours). Transfer to the tourist ger camp (B) (L) (D)

Day 5: 4 July Visits Erdene Zuu monastery, and the horse families there. Horse riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 6: 5 July Depart to Orkhon Waterfall (4-5 hours). Lunch in Khurjirt hot spring. Arrive in Orkhon Waterfall. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 7: 6 July Optional activities: Fishing, hiking, trekking, Excursion. Tent accommodation (B) (L) (D)

Day 8: 7 July Overland to Bayangobi desert (4-5 hours). Overnight in ger tourist camp (B) (L) (D)

Day 9: 8 July Visit the dunes and desert, the local camel herder and family. Hiking and camel riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger tourist camp (B) (L) (D)

Day 10: 9 July Overland back to UB. Transfer to the hotel (B) (L) (D)

Day 11: 10 July Visits Gandan monastery and the historic museum. Afternoon: visits Bod Khan museum and the monument of Zaisan. Some shopping. Overnight at hotel (B) (L) (D)

Day 12: 11 July Opening ceremony of the "Naadam Festival" (archery and wrestling). Overnight at hotel (B) (L) (D)

Day 13: 12 July W Continous the "Naadam" Festival activities (horse racing). Overnight at Hotel (B) (L) (D)

Day 14: 13 July Th Overland to observe the "Prezewalski's" (Wild) horses in Hustain Nuruu National Park. Picnic lunch.

Return to UB. Overnight at hotel (B) (L) (D)

Day 15: 14 July F Depart Mongolia (B)

Price Double Occupancy Per Person

4-10 pax : US \$1190

+11 pax: US \$1140

Airfare is not included in the tour price.

Single Supplement: US \$ 39 per night at Bayangol or Flower Hotel
(minimum 2 persons, one overland free for every 12 paying clients)
(valid to 9 July)

Booking be made 25 -35 days in advance or be subject to availability

Travel documents:

-A valid passport.

-Mongolian visa.

If you need an invitation (USD \$ 16), we will send directly to you.

The Airport visas (\$ 50 USD per person + 2 photos) are only available for people who are travelling thru multiple countries or didn't have a Mongolian consulate in their country.

Payment:

A wire transfer 25 days prior the trip to our account or pay 30 % directly in cash in Ulaanbaatar

12.2.3 Adventure Travel & Trekking

Specialty Categories: Nature, Camping, Fishing, Nomadic Families, Bayangobi desert, Wild horses, Trekking, Hiking.

The Best Tourist Sities to visit:

KaraKorum: About 400 kms south-west of Ulaanbaatar, Kharhorin (formely known as KaraKorum) was the capital of the Mongolian empire in the 13th century, before Kublai Khan moved it to Beijing.

Erdene Zuu monastery: Near KaraKorum is this monastery, built in 1586 with stones from the ruins of KaraKorum. Erdene Zuu was the first buddhist center in Mongolia.

Orkhon waterfall: Formed by volcanic and earthquake activities 20-30,000 years ago.

Khono Khan Uul (1967m): Near the border with Ovorkhangai aimag, is the 1967 m peak of Khogno Khan mountain. Nearby, there are ruins of some monasteries, destroyed by the armies of Jungar Galdan in the late 17th century.

Mountains of Khairt Khan and Khustain Nuruu uul: Przewaslki's wild horse was re-introduction in Hustain Nuruu Natural reserve.

OUR SUGGESTED ITINERARY WILL BE AS FOLLOWS

Your Itinerary:

Day 1 Fly Ulaanbaatar (UB). Transfer to Hotel. National concert. (D)

Day 2 Depart to Terelj National Park. Transfer to the ger camp. Dinner. Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 3 Visits the Tortoise rock and the horse families. Enjoy the Nature and horse riding. Return to UB. Overnight at Hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 4 Overland departure to Karakorum (the old capital of the great Mongolian Empire, 6 hours). Transfer to the ger tourist camp. Dinner. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 5 Visit the Erdene Zuu monastery. Visit the city and nomadic families. Horse riding tour. Dinner. Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 6 Depart to Orkhon Waterfall (4-5 hours, Off Road). Lunch in Khurjirt hot spring. Continuos overland to Orkhon Waterfall. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 7 Breakfast. Optional activities: fishing, hiking, trekking, excursion. Dinner (Tent accommodation) (B) (L) (D)

Day 8 Overland to Bayangobi desert (4-5 hours). Transfer to the ger camp

Day 9 Visits the dunas and nomadic families. Hiking and camel riding (extra cost).

Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 10 Khogno Khan (6 hours in route) Travel to Khogno Khan. The group will trek and hike. Overnight in tent (B) (L) (D)

Day 11 Khogno Khan Hiking and trekking. The other half will trek and the other half hike. Visits the ruins of some monasteries Free time. Overnight in tent. (B) (L) (D)

Day 12 Overland back to Ulaanbaatar (6 hours). Transfer to the hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 13 Visits Gandan Buddhist monastery and the historic museum. Afternoon: visits Bod Khan museum and monument of Zaisan. Some shopping. Overnight at hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 14 Overland to see the Wild Horse National Reserve Park. Picnic lunch. Return to Ulaanbaatar. Transfer to hotel. Some Shopping. Overnight at hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 15 Departure Mongolia (B)

Land Cost per person :

4-10 pax : US \$ 1150 at Flower or Bayagol Hotels.

+11 pax: US \$ 1092 at Flower or Bayagol Hotels.

+11 pax : US \$ 1190 at Genghis Khan Hotel (**** stars,)

Single Supplement: US \$ 39 at Flower Japanese or Bayangol Hotels

US \$ 44 at Genghis Khan Hotel (**** stars)

Add single supplement \$ US 24 for single ger in the countryside.

(minimum 2 persons, one overland free for every 12 paying clients)

(valid to 10 October)

availability

Items included :

5 nights Hotel accommodations (double room) in UB with daily breakfast.
 5 nights ger tourist camp accommodations.
 4 nights accommodations in tents.
 13 days of fullboard with one glass free drink.
 1 day of only dinner with one glass free drink (first day)
 1 day of only breakfast (last day)
 Performance (concert) as listened in the program.
 Entrance fees to "Terej" National Park, to the Wild Horses Reserve, and to the museums.
 All transfers as listened in the program.
 Local english translators-guia.
 Sightseeings.

Not included:

-visa
 -drinks.
 -Sleeping bags.
 -Own Expenses
 -Optional activities: horse or camel riding.
 -tips.
 -airport tax (\$ 12 USD).
 -Airfare Included: No

GENERAL CONDITIONS:

All trips are limited in the number of participants, thus applications are taken on a first come, first served basis. If you have to cancel for any reason, notify us in writing and your money will be returned minus a service charge (\$140 USD).

No refunds within 14 days of trip departure.

Participants must be people with a strong sense of the adventure, excellent physical conditions, experience in overland OFF ROAD, hiking, trekking, and some skill on horse riding. Requiere the knowing of the basis Mongolian conditions and technics of the activity.

Vegetarians or people following special diet should inform us in advance in order to preview thier appropriate menu (prices will be increased)

12.2.4 Nomadic Discovery Tour

Specialty Categories: Nomadic slyle- life, Discovery, Nature, National Park, Camping, Horse riding, Nomadic Family, Excursions, Trekking, Hiking, Walking, Buhhist monastery, Wild Horses in Hustain Nuruu reserve.

Highlights: Terej National Park, Karakorum, Erdene Zuu monastery, Wild Horses in Hustain Nuruu reserve.

Tour Summary:

Mongolia, in beautiful natural locations, with comfortable gers (Mongolian felt tents) with beds and furtinure, restaurant-ger only in Mongolia. No hotels, saunas or tennis courts-just nature!

Przewalski horses:

Przewalski horses have become extinct in the wild only recently, in the second half of the twentieth century. Happily, some horses did survive is zoo's. After careful preparation and breeding the reintroduction of the Przewalski horses is made in the nineties in several Mongolian nature reserves. Up till now, only the reintroduction in the Hustain Nuruu Reserve seems to have been successful.

THE HUSTAIN NURUU STEPPE

The steppe zone in Mongolia is located in between the forest zone / taiga in the north and the desert zone in the south, with two intermediary zones in between: the forest-steppe and the semi-desert, each with its own characteristic species.

In spring / summer beautiful flowers like iris, crocus, tulips etc. Show, but this beauty dries out quickly in the summer. The Hustain Nuruu Reserve (Hustai is Mongolian for birch and nuruu means mountains) measures about 57,000 hectares, or including the bufferzone 120.000 ha., and is located on about 100 km west from the capital Ulaanbaatar.

GORKI-TERELJ NATIONAL PARK :

Formed in 1993, the National Park covers 2,864 square kilometres, is about 80km north-east of Ulaanbaatar.

Terelj is a picturesque place of high cliffs eroded in Mesozoic granites, creating a wonderful landscape of granite tors. Huge blocks of granite have been eroded by wind, rain, ice and natural acids into bizarre shapes, as if by some giant sculptor. To cater for visitors, there are a National ger tourists camps in beautiful natural locations, forests and the Terelj river. Also the tourist can visit the nomadic families, horse or camel riding, fishing, hiking, trekking, exploration the nature and the wildlife.

Your Itinerary :

Day 1 Arrive in Ulaanbaatar (UB) and transfer to the Genghis Khan Ger Camp(D)

Day 2 Morning visit Gandan buddhist monastery. After lunch, departure to the National Park "Terelj". Visits the tortoise rock and the Nomadic families. Transfer to the tourist mongolian ger camp. Excursion, trekking and hiking. Enjoy the nature and clean air. Overnight in ger.

(B) (L) (D)

Day 3 Excursion, trekking and hiking. Enjoy the nature and the clean air. Horse riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 4 After lunch pick up in ger camp and return to Ulaanbaatar. Lunch. Visits the historic and natural museums. Overnight in Genghis Khan Ger Camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 5 Overland to Karakorum (6 hours). Transfer to the ger tourist camp. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 6 Visits the Erdene Zuu monastery and the nomadic families. Horse treks (extra cost). Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 7 Overland to observe the Wild Horses in Hustain Nuruu reserve. Visits the nomadic family and the Turkish graves (X century). Transfer to the Genghis Khan Ger Camp.

(B) (L) (D)

Day 8 Departure Mongolia. (B)

Items included in Mongolia:

2 nights Genghis Khan Ger accommodations

5 nights ger tourist camp accommodations.

6 days of full board with one glass free drinks.

1 day with only breakfast (last day)

1 day with only dinner (first day)

Entrance fees to the National concert and museums as listed in the program.

Entrance fee to Wild Horses in Hustain Nuruu reserve, to "Terelj" National Park

(Conservation the wildlife in the region).

All transfers as listed in the program.

1 Local English translator-guia for each group of 10 pax.

Tour Price : (ger accommodations in double or triple occupancy)

2-10 pax: \$610 per person

+11 pax: \$553 per person

Not included:

Drinks, Visa, Tips, Airport tax (\$US12), Own Expenses in /outside, horse or camel riding.

The domestic or international airtickets.

Add single supplement \$ US 24 for single ger in the countryside.

(minimum 2 persons, one overland free for every 16 paying clients)

(valid to 15 October)

Booking be made 25-30 days in advance or be subject to availability

General Conditions:

All trips are limited in the number of participants, thus applications are taken on a first come, first served basis. If you have to cancel for any reason, notify us in writing and your money will be returned minus a service charge (\$ 140 USD).

No refunds within 14 days of trip departure.

Participants must be people with a strong sense of the nomadic adventure, excellent physical conditions, experience in overland OFF ROAD, hiking, trekking, and some skill on horse riding. Require the knowing of the basis Mongolian conditions and technics of the activity.

Vegetarians or people following special diet should inform us in advance in order to preview thier appropriate menu (tour prices will be increased).

-A valid passport.

-Mongolian visa.

If you need an invitation, we will send directly to you (USD \$ 14)

The Airport visas (\$ 50 USD per person + 2 photos) are only available for people who are travelling thru multiple countries or didn't have a Mongolian consulate in their country.

The Chinese program:

if you will need transfers and hotel accommodations in Beijing as well as the airtickets Beijing-Ulaanbaatar-Beijing, we can assist you anytime.



12.2.5 Horseback Riding to the First capital of the Great Mongolian Empire

Tour Length: 10 days / 9 nights.

Items included:

1 night hotel accommodations (double room) with daily breakfast.

4 nights ger tourist camp accommodations (three people) with three meals.

5 nights tent accommodations with three meals.

Meals and performance (concert) as listened in the program.

Entrance fees to the National concert, to the Natural museum of dinosaurs, and to Erdene

Zuu monastery.

All transfers as listened in the program.

Local English or Spanish translator-guia.

Tents and Pack horses.

Cook

Not included: Drinks, Visa, Tips, Airport tax, Own Expenses in/outside the hotel.

Payments / Policies: Full payment in advance 25 days prior the trip to our Account.

Requiere minimum of 2 people to operate any tour.

Your Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Ulaan Baatar (UB). Transfer to Genghis Khaan Ger camp. Visits to the Natural museum (dinosaurs fossils) and Gandan Buddhist monastery. National concert.

Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 2: Morning overland to Kharkhorin (6 hours). Arrive and transfer to the ger tourist camp. Overland to the horse family and select the best horse for your preparation for the

horse trip. Drive back to the ger camp. Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 3: Breakfast at ger camp. Morning beginning the horse trek to Erdene Zuu monastery (11 km). Visit the monastery.

Continue horseback riding to Shankh monastery (13 km). Picnic lunch. Horseback riding to Dulaan Uul mountain. Dinner.

Exploration the place. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 4: Breakfast at camp. Horseback riding to Khujirt tourism camp (20 km). Transfer to Khujirt tourism camp. Dinner.

Overnight in ger camp. (B) (L) (D)

Day 5: Breakfast at ger camp. Horseback riding to Orkhon river (70 km). Picnic lunch in Baga Khurkhree (55 km). Horseback

riding to Orkhon Waterfall (15 km). Dinner. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 6: Breakfast in tent camp. Horseback riding to Mogoitin Rashaan (mineral water). Exploration the forest. Picnic lunch in

Khurkhee (waterfall, 12 km). Continue riding to Tovkhon Hiid (monastery, 60 km). This monastery is on the top of mountain.

Was originally built by the great Mongolian Buddhist and sculptor, Zanabazar. Some hiking and trekking. Overnight in tents.

(B) (L) (D)

Day 7: Breakfast at tent camp. Visit the Tovkhon Hiid monastery. Exploration the place. Trekking and walking to the Orkhon

river (20 km). Fishing. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 8: Breakfast at tent camp. Horseback riding to Kharkhorin (Karakorum, 35 km).

Horseback riding to the ger camp. Overnight in ger camp (B) (L) (D)

Day 9: Morning, after breakfast drive back to Ulaan Baatar (6 hours). Arrive to UB and transfer to the hotel. Some shopping.

National Concert. Overnight at hotel in UB (B) (L) (D)

Day 10: Transfer to the airport for departure (B)

Net quote double Occupancy per person:

US \$ 649 (min. + 4 pax)

Note: Tour and Tour Information are subject to change.

General Conditions:

All trips are limited in the number of participants, thus applications are taken on a first come, first served basis. If you have to cancel for any reason, notify us in writing and your money will be returned minus a service charge (\$ 140 USD).

No refunds within 14 days of trip departure.

Airfare is not included in the tour price.

12.2.6 Exotic Great Green Tour in the Steppes of Genghis Khan

Highlights: Terelj National Park, Khorgo-Terjin Tsagaan Nuur lake National Park, Tsenger hot spring, the largest sand dunes in Mongolia, Yolym Am (it is a valley, stuck in the middle of the Gobi desert), Bazanzag (dinosaur fossil sites) and Erdene Zuu monastery in Karakorum.

Destination : Mongolia

Included Meals Abbreviations: (B) Breakfast (L) Lunch (D) Dinner

Airfare Included: No

Number of Participants: Minimum: 2 pax

Tour Duration: 22 days / 21 nights

Specialty Categories: Nature, National Parks, Fishing, Camping, Horse riding, Nomadic Family, Excursions

Your Itinerary:

Day 1 Arrive in Ulaanbaatar (UB) and transfer to the Genghis Khan Hotel (the best of Mongolia and luxury hotel in double room). (D)

Day 2 Visits Gandan buddhist monastery. Departure to the National Park "Terelj". Transfer to the tourist mongolian ger camp. Excursion, trekking and hiking. Enjoy the nature and the clean air. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 3 Visits the tortoise rock and the Nomadic families. Horse riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 4 Return to Ulaanbaatar. Transfer to the Genghis Khan hotel. Afternoon: visits the historic and natural museums. National concert. Overnight at hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 5 Overland to Karakorum (6 hours). Transfer to the ger tourist camp. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 6 Visits the Erdene Zuu monastery and the nomadic families. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 7 Continuous driving to Tsetserleg. Visit the museum of the monastery Zayayn Gegeenii Huree. Overnight at local hotel of Tsetserleg. (B) (L) (D)

Day 8 Continuous overland to TerKhiin Tsagaan Nuur (National Park). Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 9 Free day in TerKhiin Tsagaan Nuur (lake). Fishing, hiking, trekking. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 10 Visit Khorgo volcano (2 968 m). Trekking, hiking, walking. Fishing in Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur (lake). Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 11 Depart to Tsenger hot springs. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 12 Full day in Tsenger hot springs (take a hot spring baths for extra cost). Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 13 Depart to Khurjirt. Continuous drive to Tsagaan Oboo. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 14 Overland to Gobi desert. Visit Hongoryn Els Dunes (100 km long, 800 m high and 20 km wide). Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 15 Full day visit the area of Hongoryn Els Sand dunes. Visits Hongoryn Els oasis, explore the saxual forests, nomadic families and camels. Camel riding. Overnight in tents. (B) (L) (D)

Day 16 Overland to Bayanzad to visit dinosaur fossil sites. Drive ahead to ger camp. Arrive and transfer. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 17 Free day in ger camp. Camel or horse riding (extra cost). Overnight in ger (B) (L) (D)

Day 18 Depart to Yolym Am (it is a valley, stuck in the middle of the Gobi desert, with metresthick ice almost all year around). Hiking, trekking, walking through the Canyon to see the ice frozen (4 kms). Return to the ger camp. Overnight in ger. (B) (L) (D)

Day 20 Depart to Erdene Dalai (7 hours). Overnight in ger (B) (L) (D)

Day 21 Back to UB (6-7 hours). Transfer to the Genghis Khan Hotel. (B) (L) (D)

Day 22 Transfer to the airport for departure. (B)

Items included in Mongolia:

3 nights Genghis Khan hotel accommodations (in double room) with daily breakfast.

1 night local hotel accommodation in Tsetserleg.

11 nights ger tourist camp accommodations.

5 nights accommodations in tents.

20 days of full board with one glass free drinks .

1 day with only breakfast (last day)

1 day with only dinner (first day)

Entrance fees to the National concert and museums as listened in the program.

Entrance fees to "Terelj" National Park, "Terkhin Tsagaan" Nuur (lake) National Park and Yolym Am Valley (Conservation

the birdlife in the region).

All transfers as listened in the program.

1 Local English translator-guia for each group of 10 pax.

1 Cook.

Tents

Tour Price :

4-10 pax: \$ 1885 per person

+11 pax: \$ 1759 per person

Not included:

-Drinks, Visa, Tips, Airport tax (\$US 12), Own Expenses in /outside the hotel, horse or camel riding, sleeping bag.

-The domestic or international airtickets. Single room supplement.

-Travel or Medical insurance.

Add single supplement \$ US 44 per day at Genghis Khan hotel.

Add single supplement \$ US 24 for single ger in the countryside.

(minimum 2 persons, one overland free for every 12 paying clients)

(valid to 15 October)

Booking be made 10-15 days in advance or be subject to availability

12.3 Mongolia Outback

ULAANBAATAR . TERELJ - ULAANBAATAR

Day 1: Arrival, meet and transfer from station to Ekhlel hotel

Day 2: In the morning trip to Terelj (car, driver and guide), overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger) (B,L,D)

Day 3: Optional trekking and horse trek, overnight in ger (B,L,D)

Day 4: Check out from the camp, return to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to Ekhlel hotel (B)

Day 5: Departure transfer to station (B)

ULAANBAATAR

Day 1: Arrival, meet and transfer from station to Ekhlel hotel

Day 2: Free day, overnight in Ekhlel hotel (B)

Day 3: Departure transfer to station (B)

ULAANBAATAR . KHAR KHORIN - ULAANBAATAR

Day 1: Drive to Bayan Gobi ger camp, visit a nomad family, sand dunes, overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)

Day 2: Trip to Khar Khorin, visit famous Buddhist Erdene Zuu monastery built in 1586, return to the Bayan Gobi camp, overnight in a ger

Day 3: Drive back to Ulaanbaatar. Transfer to hotel

ULAANBAATAR . SOUTH GOBI - ULAANBAATAR

Day 1: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, meet and transfer to the Undruul hotel , guided city sightseeing by tour bus, visit Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar central square, Zaisan memorial, overnight in the hotel

Day 2: Drive to Middle Gobi, along the road observe the features of local life and scenery of the vast steppe, overnight in outdoor camping tents

Day 3: Arrive to South Gobi. Overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)

Day 4: This day we make a trip to Yol Am gorge (shelters glaciers) and visit Nature museum, after lunch and checking out from the camp we drive to Bayanzag or Flaming Cliffs famous for dinosaur findings, after the exploration we will enjoy a dinner in this mysterious place, overnight in outdoor camping tents

Day 5: Head to the north to Ongiin monastery ruins located in the middle Gobi which was destroyed during the communist repression. Exploration and stay overnight in ger camp

Day 6: Drive to Khar Khorin. Arrive and visit the famous Erdene Zuu monastery built in 1586, using stones from the ruins of ancient Khar Khorin, overnight in ger camp

Day 7: Drive to Bayan Gobi ger camp, visit a nomad family, sand dunes, overnight in ger camp

Day 8: Drive back to Ulaanbaatar, shopping and folk performance in the evening, overnight in the Undruul hotel

Day 9: Departure transfer to the airport or railway station

HORSETREK IN ARKHANGAI PROVINCE

Day 1: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, meet and transfer to the Undruul hotel , guided city sightseeing by tour bus, visit Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar central square, Zaisan memorial, overnight in the hotel

Day 2: Drive to Khar Khorin, visit the famous Erdene Zuu monastery surrounded by 108 stupas, built in 1586. Overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)

Day 3: Drive to Tsenkheriin hot spa, riding and training. Overnight in a ger camp

- Day 4:** Start the horsetrek to Tsetserleg, we travel along the beautiful valleys of rivers such as Urd Tamir, Tsenkheriin gol and many small streams, grazing horses, yaks, sheeps in the valleys with Poplar trees, the view of Khangai mountain ranges covered with Siberian Lurch, some valleys carpeted with Edelweiss and many other wild flowers. Arrive to Tsetserleg, overnight in a local hotel or a ger camp. 26 km of riding
- Day 5:** Continue the horsetrek to Taikhar Chuluu rock, passing the Tsagaan Davaa (the highest point of the track, when we cross the Bulgan Mountain). Overnight in camping tents
- Day 6:** Horsetrek to the Khanui river. Visit nomads and enjoy the wilderness. Overnight in camping tents. 20 km of riding
- Day 7:** Continue riding to the Dongoin Davaa (highest point of the road with Ovoo - a shamanist pile of rocks, wood and other offerings to the spirits of the mountains and etc.) Overnight in a camping tents. 40 km of riding
- Day 8:** Horsetrek to Chuluut river. This river is bound with fish and snakes trough a beautiful canyon. Overnight in camping tents. 40 km of riding
- Day 9:** Horsetrek to Terkhiin Tsagaan lake, passing areas formed by volcanic eruptions, lavas and stones. Overnight in a ger camp. 40 km of riding
- Day 10:** Explorations of the extinct volcano crater and surrounding area. Overnight in camping tents on shore of Terkhiin Tsagaan lake. The horses and the local horse riding guides will return to the Tsenkher hot spa
- Day 11:** Drive back to Tsenkher hot spa. Overnight in a ger camp
- Day 12:** Drive to Bayan Gobi camp. Overnight in a ger camp
- Day 13:** Drive back to Ulaanbaatar, shopping and folk performance in the evening, overnight in the Undruul hotel
- Day 14:** Departure transfer

OVERLAND SPECIAL EXPEDITION: TAIGA FOREST . GOBI DESERT

Passing 6 geographic zones you will have a full appreciation of the country. s bests. The Khovsgol National Park has an area of 8.381 square km including the lake of Khovsgol. A huge deep lake situated on the northern edge of Mongolia and it covers an area of 2,612 square km. It extends 134 km from north to south and is 39 km wide. Khovsgol lake is one of the deepest lakes in Central Asia with a maximum depth of 262 m. Its water is crystal clear and fresh and the water surface is 1624 m above the sea level.

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the Megjid Janraisig God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** Early in the morning checking out for the flight Ulaanbaatar . Muron, arrive in the afternoon and drive 140 km north to the lake, settle into your overnight accommodation in ger camp
- Day 3:** Drive to visit reindeer tribe. Explorations and leisure at lake, overnight in the ger camp at the lake shore
- Day 4:** Drive to Terkhiin Tsagaan lake via Muron. Overnight in camping tents
- Day 5:** Continue driving to Terkhiin Tsagaan lake, meet yak breeding nomad families, overnight on the way in camping tents
- Day 6:** Arrive to Terkhiin Tsagaan lake, explorations of the extinct volcano crater, leisure, overnight in camping tents
- Day 7:** Trekking, hiking and leisure in the area of Terkhiin Tsagaan lake, overnight in a ger camp
- Day 8:** Drive to Tsetserleg town, visit a wonderful local ethnographic museum overnight in camping tents in the valley of the Tamir river
- Day 9:** Drive to Khar Khorin, visit Erdene Zuu monastery, o/n in a ger camp
- Day 10:** Drive to Gobi, arrive to the ruins of the Ongiin monastery, explorations and overnight in camping tents
- Day 11:** Drive to Bayanzag famous for dinosaur findings, exploration of the area and drive to Togrogiin Shiree also very famous for dinosaur findings, overnight in camping tents
- Day 12:** Drive to Hongoryn Els dunes passing the crossing of Gurvan Saikhan mountains range, late afternoon we arrive in Hongoryn Els, amazing scenery of the desert and dunes, spend night in tents near an oasis
- Day 13:** Trip to Yol Am gorge, after the explorations of the gorge drive to the ger camp spend the night in gers
- Day 14:** Transfer to the Dalanzadgad airport, flight to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to the Undruul hotel, leisure, in the evening we enjoy a folk performance, overnight in the hotel
- Day 15:** City tour visiting the highlights of Ulaanbaatar such as palace museum of the last theocracy leader of Mongolia Bogdo Khaan, monastery museum of Choijin Lama and Fine Arts museum of His High Holiness Zanabazar, shoppings, overnight in the hotel
- Day 16:** Departure transfer

Specific interest: Khovsgol lake, Terkhiin Tsagaan lake, Gobi desert, nomads, outdoor activities, wild like and rare animals, dinosaur findings

Tour cost includes: 3 nights hotel accommodation in Ulaanbaatar, 2 nights accommodation in ger camps, 7 nights in tents, all meals on tour, tour drivers, guide-interpreter, sleeping bags, entrance fees and provincial taxes, plane ticket to Muron

CAMEL RIDING EXPERIENCE

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** Flight to Dalanzadgad, transfer to the base camp, afternoon we make a trip to Bayanzag or Flaming Cliffs famous for dinosaur's findings, return to the camp, overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)

- Day 3:** Drive to Hongoryn Els visiting on the way a Yol Am canyon 45, late afternoon we arrive to Hongoryn Els dunes Hoolt 120 km, o/n in camping tents
- Day 4:** Camel riding we start from Hoolt village, 10 km ride and lunch on the northern side of Hongoryn dunes, 15 km ride we settle our overnight camping, o/n in camping tents
- Day 5:** Camel riding, ride 15 km till Seruun Bulag sping, lunch, afternoon ride to Hanan Els 10 km, o/n in camping tents
- Day 6:** Camel riding to Tsonjin Hotgor 12 km, lunch, afternoon ride through the saxauls bushes to Adag Gashuun 15 km, o/n in camping tents
- Day 7:** Camel riding, 12 km lunch, afternoon ride Chono Haraihyn Zadgai, 14 km o/n in tents
- Day 8:** Camel riding to Balgant 30 km, o/n in camping tents
- Day 9:** Camel riding to Uujim 10 km, o/n in camping tents
- Day 10:** Camel riding to Seruun Bulag 15 km, last o/n in camping tents
- Day 11:** Return to the base camp
- Day 12:** Flight to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to Undruul hotel
- Day 13:** Free day in Ulaanbaatar, o/n in hotel
- Day 14:** Departure

CHINGIS KHAAN

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** Drive to Amarbayasgalant monastery, overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)
- Day 3:** Drive to Khovsgul lake via Bulgan, o/n in camping tents
- Day 4:** Towards to Khovsgul, o/n in camping tents
- Day 5:** Leisure at lake, o/n in ger
- Day 6:** Leisure at lake, o/n in ger
- Day 7:** Drive to Khorgo, o/n on the way in camping tents
- Day 8:** We arrive to Khorgo, leisure at lake, overnight in camping tents
- Day 9:** Exploration of extinct volcano crater, leisure at Terhiin Tsagaan Lake, overnight in camping tents
- Day 10:** Drive to Tsetserleg town, visit wonderful local Nature history museum, overnight in camping tents or ger
- Day 11:** Drive to Kara Korum, visit Erdene Zuu monastery, o/n in ger
- Day 12:** Drive to Gobi, arrive to the ruins of the Ongiin monastery, explorations and o/n in camping tents
- Day 13:** Drive to Bayanzag famous for dinosaurs findings, exploration of the area and arrive to the Gobi camp, o/n in ger camp
- Day 14:** Trip to Yol Am canyon, o/n in ger
- Day 15:** Transfer to the Dalanzadgad airport, flight to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to the hotel, leisure, in the evening we enjoy a folk performance, o/n in Undruul hotel
- Day 16:** City tour visiting the highlights of Ulaanbaatar such as palace museum of the last theocracy leader of Mongolia Bogdo Khaan, monastery museum of Chojin Lama and Fine Art museum of His High Holiness Zanabazar, shoppings, o/n in hotel
- Day 17:** Departure transfer

TREKKING IN NAIMAN NUUR LAKE

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** Drive to Hustain Nuruu . Przewalski horse Reserve, explorations, overnight in overnight experience in the famous Mongolian dwelling tent (ger)
- Day 3:** Trekking and explorations in the area of Hustain Nuruu Reserve, overnight in gers
- Day 4:** Drive to Baga Gazriin Chuluu (1768 m high rock formations, opportunity of wildlife wieving such as Argali sheep, Ibex etc), Middle Gobi or Desert - Steppe Zone. The lush green grasslands of the steppe give way to a transition, the Desert - Steppe zone on the north rim of the Gobi desert. The transition zone covers 20 % of Mongolia, a dry region of parched grasslands and salt pans. It has grasses and shrubs very different from those of the Steppe Zone, overnight in camping tents
- Day 5:** Drive to Bayanzag famous for dinosaurs findings appx.180 km, 4-5 h driving (The well-known, red . flaming cliffs. of Bayanzag are situated about 100 km north-west of Dalanzadgad. Here, in 1922, Roy Chapman Andrews from the American Museum of Natural History in New York discovered great numbers of bones. They belonged to a hitherto unknown, horned and herbivorous dinosaur approximately 2 m logn. It was later named Protoceratops andrewsi after its discoverer. In two years of digging, more than one hundred individuals were unearthed. During this time, Chapman and his colleagues first discovered dinosaur nests complete with clutches of eggs; a discovery which drew world-wide attention. What natural disasters mar have surprised and killed all these dinosaurs? Scientists think that the animals were buried under sandslides. Large sand dunes saturated with rain water collapsed and flowed lava-like into the valley. Today, the occasional heavy rains and the strong spring storms expose the skeletons by washing away the surface layer.), explorations and . fun. diggings, excursions to saxaul forest shrubs, overnight in camping tents

- Day 6:** Drive to Gurvan Saikhan mountains (National Park). Arrive to Khan Bogd ger camp located in Gurvan Saikhan mountains, afternoon trekking to Yoliin Am Gorge, explorations, overnight in gers
- Day 7:** Drive to Hongoriin Els dunes (Hongoryn els is the largest accumulation of sand in the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park. With an area of over 900 km² it is one of the biggest areas of sand in Mongolia. The dunes rise abruptly from the plain. The wind continually blows from the north west; therefore the dunes can reach an imposing 200 m in height on the leading edge. These high dunes are called . singing sands. by the local inhabitants. The dunes are situated in a basin surrounded by mountains. They are 6 - 12 km wide and over 100 km long. The sand in the basins between the mountains originated in ancient lakes and rivers. The wind subsequently shaped it into dunes), depending the weather, road conditions approximated arrival time in Hongoriin Els is at 6 . 7 pm, set up tented camp, after dinner short explorations and trekking among the dunes, overnight in camping tents
- Day 8:** Full day trekking in Hongoriin Els dunes, overnight in camping tents
- Day 9:** Drive to Baga Bogd mountains 3590 m, overnight in camping tents
- Day 10:** Route to Naiman Nuur (extinct vulcanic area and 8 lakes formations) overnight on the way in camping tents nearby Arvaikheer
- Day 11:** Drive to Naiman Nuur Nature Reserve, depending the road and weather conditions it is required long and slow drive, arrival, explorations and trekking in the area, overnight in camping tents
- Day 12:** Trekking and explorations in the area of Naiman Nuur lakes (extinct vulcanic area and 8 lakes formations), overnight in camping tents
- Day 13:** Drive to Bat . Ulzii sum, overnight in camping tents near Orkhon waterfall (the beginning of the Orkhon river regarded among the Mongols as a . mother. river. The most ancient tribes and civilizations lived following the riverbank of Orkhon)
- Day 14:** Explorations and trekking in the area of Orkhon waterfall, overnight in camping tents
- Day 15:** Drive to Khar Khorin, visit the famous Erdene Zuu monastery, afternoon drive to Hogno Khaan, overnight in ger camp
- Day 16:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, evening enjoy folk performance, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 17:** Departure transfer

FISHING IN CHULUUT RIVER

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** Early in the morning we drive to Ogi lake, start pike fishing overnight in camping tents
- Day 3:** Day will be spent fishing around lakeshore of Ogi lake/ overnight in camping tents
- Day 4:** In the afternoon we head to the river Chuluut spending overnight on the way in camping tents
- Day 5:** We arrive in Chuluut river, start a taimen fishing overnight in camping tents
- Day 6:** We drive along the river to seek for the best catch overnight in camping tents
- Day 7:** Day will be spent in Chuluut river /overnight in camping tents
- Day 8:** Drive back to Ogi lake / overnight in camping tents
- Day 9:** Drive back to Ogi lake / overnight in camping tents
- Day 10:** Return to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to the Undruul hotel, free time
- Day 11:** Departure

FISHING AT THE SELENGE AND EG RIVERS

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel
- Day 2:** We depart Ulaanbaatar in the morning to Magsarjav farm 350 km and establish tented camp and start a taimen fishing in the Selenge river
- Day 3:** Day will be spent on the riverside of Selenge /overnight in camping tents
- Day 4:** This day we drive to Teshig village 250 -280 km and further to the confluence of Tavt and Eg rivers 20 km, start a taimen and lenok fishing / overnight in camping tents
- Day 5:** In the afternoon we drive along the river to Tarvagatai 40 km and start a taimen and lenok fishing / overnight in camping tents
- Day 6:** Day will be spent on the riverside of Eg river/ overnight in camping tents
- Day 7:** We head to the Darkhan city, overnight in the local hotel
- Day 8:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, transfer to the Undruul hotel, free time
- Day 9:** Departure

FISHING AT BALJ AND ONON RIVERS

- Day 1:** Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, city tours visiting a Gandan Monastery, 25.6 m high Gilded bronze statue of the MegjidJanraisid God . Eye Opener. , Natural History museum, Sukhbaatar main square, Zaisan Hill, dinner will be provided at hotel restaurant, overnight in Undruul hotel

- Day 2:** We fly from Ulaanbaatar to Dadal 450-500km and drive to Balj river, start a taimen fishing, overnight in camping tents
- Day 3:** Day will be spent on the riverside of Balj
- Day 4:** This day we drive to Onon river
- Day 5:** Day will be spent in Onon river
- Day 6:** Drive to the confluence of Onon and Balj river
- Day 7:** Drive to the confluence of Onon and Balj river
- Day 8:** Drive to Dadal, overnight in famous Mongolian dwelling tents (ger)
- Day 9:** Return flight to Ulaanbaatar, transfer to the Undruul hotel, free time
- Day 10:** Departure