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ACCOMMODATION

Like most things about Mongolia, the accommodation situation in Ulaanbaatar is vastly different from what you will find anywhere outside of the capital city. In Ulaanbaatar, there is a wide range of accommodation, from dorm-style places for US\$4 a night to suites in the Chinggis Khaan Hotel, which cost almost as much as Mongolia's gross domestic product. Outside the capital, hotel options are limited and generally poor in quality and services.

One unique option, particularly popular with organised tours, is to stay in tourist gers, which are like those used by nomads – except for the hot water, toilets, sheets and karaoke

bars. Also seriously consider bringing your own tent and camping – it's free, and you really experience what Mongolia has to offer.

Payment for accommodation is usually made upon checkout, but some receptionists will ask for money upfront. Remember that most hotels in the countryside will charge you a 'foreigner price' (which is sometimes double the local rate).

If you negotiate a reasonable price with the management, try to pay immediately and get a receipt. Asking for a receipt can sometimes drop the price dramatically; in some cases the staff will charge you the 'foreigner price' but register you as a Mongolian (ie put the 'Mongolian price' down on paper and pocket the difference).

Hotel staff may ask to keep your passport as 'security'. This is not a good idea, for three reasons: staff often do not show up for work (so the person with your passport cannot be found when you want to depart); once staff have your passport, it leaves you open to possibly being asked to pay more for your room while a taxi waits for you outside; or you may simply forget to pick it up and be 300km away before you realise. An expired passport, student card or some other ID with your photo is a great alternative to leaving your real passport.

Security should be a consideration. Always keep your windows and door locked (where possible). Staff may enter your room while you're not around; take any valuables with you or at least keep them locked inside your luggage and don't leave cameras and money lying around your room. Most hotels have a safe where valuables can be kept.

Apartments

Apartment rental is really only an option in Ulaanbaatar; see p82 for details.

Camping

Mongolia is probably the greatest country in the world for camping. With 1.5 million sq km of unfenced and unowned land, spectacular scenery and freshwater lakes and rivers, it is just about perfect. The main problem is a lack of public transport to great camping sites,

PRACTICALITIES

- The weekly English-language newspapers are the *Mongol Messenger* (www.mongolmessenger.mn) and the *UB Post* (<http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn>). Both have good articles, events listings and classified sections.
- Major private dailies in Mongolian include *Ardiin Erkh* (People's Right), *Zunny Medee* (Century News), *Odriin Sonin* (Daily News) and *Önöödör* (Today).
- BBC World Service has a nonstop service at 103.1FM. Local stations worth trying include Jag (107FM), Blue Sky (100.9FM) and Radio Ulaanbaatar (102.5FM). Voice of America news programmes are occasionally broadcast on 106.6FM.
- Local TV stations don't start broadcasting until the afternoon and switch off around 11pm. All the stations have political allies: Channel 25 favours the Democrats, Channel 9 prefers the MPRP and the others go with whoever is in power.
- Electric power is 220V, 50Hz. The sockets are designed to accommodate two round prongs in the Russian/European style.
- Mongolia follows the metric system.
- As in the USA, the ground floor is called the 1st floor, as opposed to the UK system, where the next floor above ground level is the 1st floor.

though there are some accessible sites near Ulaanbaatar, such as in Gachuurt, Khandgait and Terelj. Camping is also well worth considering given the poor choice of hotels and the expense of ger camps.

Local people (and even a few curious cows or horses) may come to investigate your camping spot, but you are very unlikely to encounter any hostility. Your jeep driver will have ideas about good places to stay, otherwise look for somewhere near water or in a pretty valley. If you're hitching, it is not hard to find somewhere to pitch your tent within walking distance of most aimag capitals and towns. You will need to bring your own tent and cooking equipment if you want to camp away from the main towns or avoid the local *quanz* (canteen).

To wash yourself, you'll probably need to use the local town's bathhouse. Many are listed under the Information entries in this book. Be aware, though, that the bathhouses won't be like what you'd expect to find in Turkey; in Mongolia they are simply for getting a hosedown.

Be mindful of your security. If drunks spot your tent, you could have a problem. If the owners (and their dog) give you permission, camping near a ger is a good idea for extra security; otherwise camp at least 300m from other gers. Mongolians have little or no idea of the Western concept of privacy, so be prepared for the locals to open your

tent and look inside at any time – no invitation is needed.

You can often get boiled water, cooked food, uncooked meat and dairy products from nearby gers in exchange for other goods or money, but always leave something and don't rely on nomads, who may have limited supplies of food, water and fuel. It is best to bring a portable petrol stove rather than use open fires, which are potentially dangerous, use precious wood and may not be possible where wood is scarce.

A few extra tips:

- Burn dried dung if you are being eaten alive by mosquitoes (you may then have to decide which is worse: mozzies or burning cow shit) and bring strong repellent with as much DEET as possible. Other anti-mosquito measures include wearing light-coloured clothing, avoiding perfumes or aftershave, impregnating clothes and mosquito nets with permethrin (nontoxic insect repellent), making sure your tent has an insect screen and camping away from still water or marshes (camping in hills or mountains is always better than low-lying areas).
- Make sure your tent is waterproof before you leave home and always pitch it in anticipation of strong winds and rain.
- Ensure your gear is warm enough for sub-zero temperatures, or you'll freeze. Cheap and flimsy Chinese-made tents

and sleeping bags bought in UB won't cut it, especially for camping in the mountains. Bring the best stuff you can get your hands on for an enjoyable trip.

- Store your food carefully to protect it from creatures of the night.
- Don't pitch your tent under trees (because of lightning) or on or near riverbeds (flash floods are not uncommon).

For more advice on camping responsibly in Mongolia, see p60.

Gers

For information of ger etiquette, see p33.

TOURIST GER CAMPS

Tourist ger camps are found all over Mongolia. They may seem touristy and are often surprisingly expensive but if you are going into the countryside, a night in a tourist ger is a great way to experience a Western-oriented, 'traditional Mongolian nomadic lifestyle' without the discomforts or awkwardness of staying in a private ger.

A tourist ger camp is a patch of ground with several (or sometimes dozens of) traditional gers, with separate buildings for toilets, hot showers and a ger-shaped restaurant/bar. Inside each ger, there are usually two to three beds, an ornate table, four tiny chairs and a wood stove that can be used for heating during the night – ask the staff to make it for you. The beds are really just smallish cots – if you are built like an NBA basketball player or a sumo wrestler, you'll need to make special arrangements.

Toilets are usually the sit-down types, though they may be (clean) pit toilets.

Prices for tourist camps often depend on the location. Where there is lots of competition, ie Lake Khövsgöl, Kharkhorin and Terkhiiin Tsagaan Nuur, you can find basic camps for under T5000 per night. Better camps or camps in remote areas may charge US\$20 to US\$30 (or more) per person per night, including meals. Activities such as horse or camel riding will cost extra. A surprising amount of the charge goes to the food bill, so you may be able to negotiate a discount of 50% to 65% by bringing your own food. This is pretty reasonable for a clean bed and a hot shower.

Meals are taken in a separate restaurant ger. With only a few exceptions, expect the usual Mongolian fare of meat, rice and pota-

toes. Most camps have a bar (and sometimes satellite TV and a blasted karaoke machine). There's often little to differentiate between ger camps; it's normally the location that adds the charm and makes your stay special.

If you plan to stay in a ger camp you may want to bring a torch for nocturnal visits to the toilets, candles to create more ambience than stark electric lights (though not all have electricity), towels (the ones provided are invariably smaller than a handkerchief), and toilet paper (they may run out).

Book ahead if possible. Not all ger camps have a phone so numbers in this book may be for the office in Ulaanbaatar, which will somehow get the message out that you are headed for the camp.

Except for a handful of ger camps in Terelj catering to expat skiers, most ger camps are only open from June to mid-September, although in the Gobi they open a month earlier and close a little later.

In a few touristy places, such as Terelj, Terkhiiin Tsagaan Nuur and Khövsgöl Nuur, private families often have a guest ger and take in paying guests. In this case the advice of offering gifts as payment does not apply – this is a commercial transaction. These families are rarely registered with local authorities so they don't advertise, so you'll have to ask around (any ger that is set up next to a road is a good bet).

TRADITIONAL GERS

If you are particularly fortunate you may be invited to spend a night or two out on the steppes in a genuine ger, rather than a tourist ger camp. This is a wonderful chance to experience the 'real' Mongolia.

If you are invited to stay in a family ger, only in very rare cases will you be expected to pay for this accommodation. Leaving a gift is strongly recommended. While cash payment is usually OK as a gift, it's far better to provide worthwhile gifts for the whole family, including the women (who look after the guests). Cigarettes, vodka and candy are customary gifts, but with some creativity you can offer more useful items. Constructive presents include sewing kits, lighters, toothbrushes, toothpaste, duct tape, Mongolian-language books and newspapers, and hand-powered flashlights and radios. Children will enjoy colouring books, pens, paper and puzzles.

Your host may offer to cook for you; it is polite for you to offer to supply some food, such as biscuits, bread, fruit, salt, rice and pasta. Pack out any garbage or packaging leftover from these items. Mongolians love being photographed. If you take pictures of your host family, remember to take down their name and a mail them a copy (for address purposes, you'll need their name, *sum* and *aimag*).

If you stay longer than a night or two (unless you have been specifically asked to extend your visit), you will outstay your welcome and abuse Mongolian hospitality, making it less likely that others will be welcome in the future. (Never rely on families to take you in; always carry a tent as a backup.)

Guesthouses

Ulaanbaatar now has around 20 guesthouses firmly aimed at foreign backpackers. Most are in apartment blocks and have dorm beds for around US\$4, cheap meals, a laundry service, internet connection and travel services. They are a great place to meet other travellers to share transportation costs, but can get pretty crowded before and during Naadam (11 and 12 July).

Outside Ulaanbaatar only Dalanzadgad in the Gobi and Khövsgöl Nuur in Khövsgöl have accommodation aimed at backpackers.

Hotels

Most *zochid budal* (hotels) in the countryside (and budget hotels in Ulaanbaatar) have three types of rooms: a *lux* (deluxe) room, which includes a separate sitting room, usually with TV and private bathroom; a *khagas lux* (half-deluxe), which is much the same only a little smaller but often much cheaper; and an *engiin* (simple) room, usually with a shared bathroom. Sometimes, *nitiin bair* (dorm-style) beds are also available. Invariably, hotel staff will initially show you their deluxe room (costing a minimum of T17,000) so ask to see the standard rooms if you're on a budget. Simple rooms cost around T6000 per person per night. Some rooms may cost extra if they come with TV; try the channels first as some pick up BBC while others only get Russian TV.

Budget hotels in Ulaanbaatar, lying on the fringe areas of the city, mainly cater to Mongolian truck drivers – guesthouses are a much better idea. If you plan to stay in budget

hotels in the countryside you should bring a sleeping bag. An inner sheet (the sort used inside sleeping bags) is also handy if the sheets are dirty. Blankets are always available, but are generally dirty or musty.

Midrange places are generally good but rather overpriced, charging US\$40 to US\$60 for a double. These rooms will be comfortable and clean and probably have satellite TV. Hot water and heating is standard for most buildings and hotels in Ulaanbaatar, and air-conditioning is never needed. The staff in midrange and top-end places will speak English. A private room or apartment, available through the guesthouses, may be a better idea.

The 'foreigner price' in this book may be quoted in US dollars (because the exchange rate fluctuates), but you should pay in tögrög because it is now the law.

In the countryside, most hotels are generally empty and falling apart, though facilities continue to improve and almost every aimag capital will have one decent new place. Even at the best places you can expect dodgy plumbing, broken locks and electrical outages. The quality of hotels in the countryside is reason enough to take a tent and go camping.

As for service, it is generally poor, except for top-end places in Ulaanbaatar. You'll gain little by getting angry – just be businesslike and eventually you'll get what you want. If the staff haven't seen guests for a long time (very possible in the countryside), they might have to search for some sheets, blankets, even a bed, washstand and water, and then rouse a cook to light a fire to get some food ready a few hours later.

If the hotel has no hot water (most likely outside UB) or no water at all, it's worth knowing that most aimag capitals have a public bathroom.

ACTIVITIES

Mongolia is all about getting out into the countryside; there are a host of active options for you to pursue. For details of overseas companies that organise activities, see p270; for companies based in Mongolia see p80. Some of the most popular activities – such as cycling, hiking, rafting, fishing and, of course, horse riding – can be found in our Mongolia Outdoors chapter (p55). Additional activities are listed following.

Birding

Mongolia is rich in birdlife; for a comprehensive look see <http://birdsmongolia.blogspot.com>. The best places to get out your binoculars and telephoto lens are the following areas:

Ganga Nuur (p182) Migratory swan.

Khar Us Nuur and Khar Nuur (p235) Goose, wood grouse and relict gull, and migratory pelican.

Khyargas Nuur and Airag Nuur (p242) Migratory cormorant and pelican.

Mongol Daguur Special Protected Area (p174)

White-napped crane and other waterfowl.

Sangiin Dalai Nuur (p197) Mongolian lark, eagle, goose and swan.

Uvs Nuur (p239) Spoonbill, crane and gull.

Dune Bugging

For a true outdoor adventure, consider travelling across the Gobi in a souped-up dune buggy. Trips are run by **Vast Gobi** (☎ 9908 2785; www.vastgobi.com), which has several homemade two-seat buggies equipped with CB radio and GPS unit. Gobi trips cost US\$190 to US\$200 per day while a day trip in Töv aimag is US\$150 (prices are per vehicle).

Golf

Although not the first sport that comes to mind when planning an adventure in Mongolia, golfing is possible. The Chinggis Khaan Country Club in Terelj (p111) is the best place to get in a round, although the UB Golf Club (p78) is a cheaper option. The more adventurous could try playing natural golf across the steppes. Just pack a five or three iron in your jeep, along with a few dozen golf balls, and golf wherever the grass looks best. There are some perfect natural fairways in northern Khentii, eastern Zavkhan, the Chandman-Öndör area in Khövsgöl, and in Övörkhangaï, south of Khujirt.

You may now be wondering if it's possible to golf *all* the way across Mongolia. As a matter of fact, it is. In 2003 and 2004 an eccentric American golfer named Andre golfed from Choibalsan to Khovd city, designating 18 cities and towns as 'holes'. Andre shot the round in 12,170 strokes, but lost more than 500 golf balls en route. You can read more about his adventure at www.golffmongolia.com.

Ice Skating

In winter you won't have to worry about falling through the ice, as many lakes and rivers freeze right down to the bottom. Many Mongolians are keen ice skaters – at least

those who live near water, or in big cities with rinks. The soccer stadium in Nairamdal Park (p78) becomes an ice rink in winter but it is not maintained so the ice gets pretty chewed up. You can rent skates here but the quality is terrible so if you're serious about this sport, bring your own equipment. Long-distance skating is possible on Lake Khövsgöl. A one-week trip with support costs around US\$1300, contact Nomadic Journeys (p81).

Mountain Biking

Mongolian roads are made for strong mountain bikes and masochistic riders. There are great biking trails in Terelj, see p113. You'll also find good trails in Altai Tavan Bogd National Park (p229) and all around Khövsgöl aimag (p57). For more cycling tips see p55.

Mountaineering

Mongolia also offers spectacular opportunities for mountain climbing. In the western aimags, there are dozens of glaciers, and 30 to 40 permanently snow-capped mountains. You must have the necessary experience, be fully equipped and hire local guides. The best time to climb is July and August.

While you don't need permits from the Ministry of Nature & Environment unless the mountain is in a national park, you may want to consult the **Mongol Altai Mountaineering Club** (☎ 011-455 246; anji@mongol.net; PO Box 49-23, Bayanzürkh, Ulaanbaatar). The club runs specially designed mountain-climbing trips. The office is in room 405 of the Physical Training Institute, opposite the Indian embassy.

The highest peaks (in ascending order):

Otgon Tenger Uul (3905m; p245) Mongolia's holiest mountain, located in Zavkhan aimag. Its sanctity means that climbing is strictly prohibited.

Türgen Uul (3965m; p241) One of the most easily climbed with spectacular views; in Uvs.

Kharkhira Uul (4037m; p241) In Uvs; a great hiking area.

Sutai Uul (4090m; p218) On the border of Gov-Altai and Khovd aimags.

Tsast Uul (4193m; p228) On the border of Bayan-Ölgii and Khovd aimags. It's accessible and the camping here is great.

Tsambagarav Uul (4202m; p228) In Khovd; it is relatively easy to climb with crampons and an ice axe.

Mönkh Khairkhan Uul (4362m; p236) On the border of Bayan-Ölgii and Khovd aimags. You will need crampons, an ice axe and ropes.

Tavan Bogd (4374m; p231) In Bayan-Ölgii, on the border of Mongolia, China and Russia. This mountain cluster is full of permanent and crevassed glaciers.

Rock Climbing

There are excellent opportunities for rock climbing in Mongolia, although the sport is still in its infancy with few established routes. For now the best place to climb is in Terelj, where routes have been established on a 35m-high rock near the Buveit ger camp (p112). Plans have been laid to keep climbing gear at the ger camp, where you can turn up and climb at a cost of US\$40 to US\$50 per day. With your own gear it's US\$35. Climbing routes have also been established at Ikh Gazryn Chuluu (p198) in Dundgov; climbers will need to bring their own equipment.

Skiing

Despite the cold temperatures and rugged terrain, there are virtually no opportunities for downhill skiing in Mongolia. Cross-country skiing, on the other hand, is limitless, as long as you can stand the cold. Ger camps in Terelj (p112) that stay open year-round make a good base for cross-country skiing. However, the snow is usually better in Khandgait (p115). The best months for skiing are January and February, although be warned: the average temperature during these months hovers around a very chilly -25°C.

Offbeat Activities

Blokarting Mongolia is perfect for blokarting (aka land sailing), but as there is nothing set up you need to BYOB (bring your own blokart). See www.gobiblokartraid.com for details.

Dog sledding Organised by Wind of Mongolia (p82). Trips are held in Terelj (December to February) for US\$60 to US\$80 per day and Khövsgöl Nuur (March to April); cross-lake trips take eight days (all-inclusive US\$2600).

Kite boarding There is nothing organised on this front so you need to bring all your own gear, but there is great boarding to be had on both Terkhiiin Tsaagan Nuur and Lake Khövsgöl.

Polo Legend has it that Chinggis Khaan's troops used to play polo using their enemies' heads as the ball, but this practice seems to have died out long ago. Modern polo (sans severed heads) is occasionally played by local clubs. See www.ghengiskhanpolo.com for details.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are usually open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Many banks stay open until 7pm and in Ulaanbaatar there are several offering 24-hour banking. Most private and state-run businesses open

at about 10am and close sometime between 5pm and 8pm. Many open on Sundays.

In the countryside, banks, museums and other facilities may close for an hour at lunch, sometime between noon and 2pm.

Outdoor markets are usually open from 9am to 7pm daily (or sunset in winter), while indoor markets open from 10am to 8pm.

Museums have reduced hours in winter and are normally closed an extra couple of days a week.

For details on the opening hours of places to eat, see p44.

CHILDREN

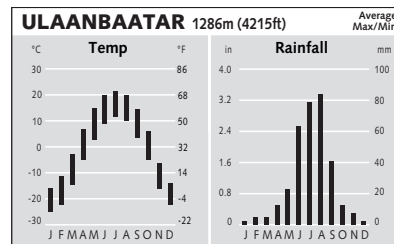
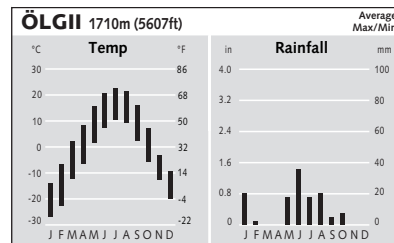
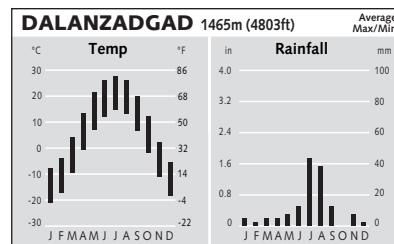
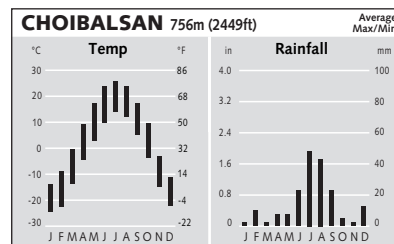
Children can be a great icebreaker and are a good avenue for cultural exchange with the local people; however, travelling in Mongolia is difficult for even a healthy adult. Long jeep rides over nonexistent roads are a sure route to motion sickness and the endless steppe landscape may leave your children comatose with boredom. Mongolian food is difficult to stomach no matter what your age. That said, children often like the thrill of camping, for a night or two at least. There are also lots of opportunities to sit on yaks, horses and camels, and plenty of opportunities to meet playmates when visiting gers. For a child-friendly experience, try the very tame rides at Nairamdal Park (Children's Park; p78) in Ulaanbaatar. Check out LP's *Travel with Children* for more general tips.

Practicalities

Items such as formula, baby food and nappies (diapers) are sold at the State Department Store (Map pp70-1) and Sky Shopping Centre (Map p64) in Ulaanbaatar, but can be more difficult to find in the countryside. Few cars in Mongolia even have working seat belts so you can pretty much rule out finding a car seat. You'll have to bring your own if you have very small children. When travelling in the countryside, deluxe hotel rooms normally come with an extra connecting room, which can be ideal for children.

CLIMATE CHARTS

It is said that Mongolia can experience four seasons in a single day. This seems especially true in spring when changeable weather creates snowstorms intermixed with bouts of wind and sun. Bear in mind the wind-chill factor: a 10-knot wind can make 0°C feel like -5°C.



The four seasons are very distinct – winter lasts from November to February, spring from March to mid-May, summer from mid-May until late August, and autumn is during September and October. The cold weather in the far north can last a month or two longer than the Gobi areas. The highest rainfalls occur in the taiga areas (subarctic coniferous forests of Siberian larch and pine trees) along the northern border, especially

Khentii and Khövsgöl. See p13 for advice about the best times to visit.

CUSTOMS

Customs officials want to keep out pornography, drugs and expensive imports that might be sold to Mongolians; they want to keep in old paintings, statues, fossils, works of art and mineral samples. Baggage searches of foreigners exiting Mongolia by air are sometimes rigorous, but are less so at border crossings by train to China or Russia, when most passengers are asleep.

When you enter Mongolia, you must fill out an English-language customs declaration form to declare any prohibited items, all precious stones and all 'dutiable goods'. You are also asked to list all monies in your possession. There is no need to be too accurate: this form is rarely checked on your way out. You should, nevertheless, keep all receipts when you change money at banks, though changing money with licensed moneychangers (who will not issue receipts) is legal.

The customs declaration is checked by the customs official and then returned to you. When you leave Mongolia, you will be asked to hand in the form – so keep it safe during your trip.

You can bring 1L of spirits, 2L of wine, 3L of beer, three bottles of perfume and 200 cigarettes into Mongolia duty-free.

If you are legally exporting any antiques, you must have a receipt and customs certificate from the place you bought them. Most reliable shops in Ulaanbaatar can provide this. If you don't get one of these you'll need to get one from the **Centre of Cultural Heritage** (☎ 011-312 735, 323 747) in the Cultural Palace in Ulaanbaatar. You'll need to fill in a form with your passport number, where the antique was purchased and two photos of the antique itself.

If you have anything that even *looks* old, it is a good idea to get a document to indicate that it is not an antique. That goes for Buddha images and statues as well.

During your trip you will probably be offered furs of rare animals, antique items such as snuffboxes, bits and pieces from Erdene Zuu Khiid, and even fossilised dinosaur bones and eggs. Please do not take up these offers. These items are precious to Mongolia's history and the fine for illegally exporting fossils is from US\$100 to US\$150, or five years in jail.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mongolia is a reasonably safe country in which to travel, but given the infrastructure of the country, state of the economy and other development problems, you are bound to run into hiccups along the way. With a bit of patience and planning, you should be able to handle just about anything.

Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a real problem but is far worse in the cities than in the countryside. Drunks are more annoying than dangerous, except when they are driving your vehicle. Drivers who work for tour companies have been disciplined to hold their alcohol on trips, but hitchhikers may encounter drunk drivers.

Drinking is pretty common on the trains, which is another reason to travel in coupé class or 'soft seat' (you can close your cabin door). If the offending drunk happens to be *in* your cabin, ask the attendant to move you to another cabin.

If camping, always make sure that you pitch your tent somewhere secluded, and that no drunks see you set up camp; otherwise, they will invariably visit you during the night.

Dogs

Stray dogs in the cities and domestic dogs around gers in the countryside can be vicious and possibly rabid. In the countryside, some dogs are so damn lazy that you wouldn't get a whimper if 100 lame cats hobbled past; others will almost head-butt your vehicle and chase it for 2km or 3km while drooling heavily. Before approaching any ger, especially in the countryside, make sure the dogs are friendly or under control and shout the phrase '*Nokhoi khor*', which roughly translates as 'Can I come in?' but literally means 'Hold the dog!'. Getting rabies shots is no fun; it's easier to just stay away from dogs, even if they appear friendly.

If you need to walk in the dark in the countryside, perhaps for a midnight trip to the toilet, locals have suggested that if you swing a torch in front of you it will stop any possible dog attack.

Scams

Professional scamming is not common; the main thing to be aware of is dodgy tour companies that don't deliver on their promises. We've had letters from readers who booked

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs

(☎ 1300 139 281; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office

(☎ 0845-850-2829; www.fco.gov.uk/countryadvice)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs

(☎ 800-267 6788; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department

(☎ 888-407 4747; www.travel.state.gov)

tours where the promised accommodation, food and service standards fell short of expectations. It might be good to get in writing exactly what is offered, and ask about compensation if things don't work out as planned. The riskiest tour companies are the ones operated by guesthouses and the ones that specialise in onward trips to Russia.

Theft

Petty theft is a fact of life in Ulaanbaatar and you need to stay vigilant of bag slashers and pick pockets, especially around Naadam time when muggers do brisk trade on all the starry-eyed tourists wandering about. In the countryside, keep an eye on your gear and don't leave valuables lying around your camp site if you wander off. Lock your kit inside your jeep or hotel whenever possible (drivers do a good job of watching your stuff). When horse trekking, be wary of Mongolians who seem to be following you; they may be after your valuables or even your horses, which are easily stolen while you sleep. For information on the dangers of theft in Ulaanbaatar, see p68.

Other Annoyances

Heating and hot-water shortages and electricity blackouts are common in aimag capitals. Some villages go for months without any utility services at all. Although official policies have relaxed considerably since the arrival of democracy, some of the old KGB-inspired thinking still occurs among the police, especially in rural backwaters and border areas.

Quarantine sometimes affects travel in Mongolia. Foot-and-mouth disease, malignant anthrax and the plague pop up all the time and may prevent you from travelling to

certain areas. Some regions that have been hit by foot-and-mouth require drivers to decontaminate their cars when they enter and leave cities. This requires the spraying of tyres (or the whole car) and can cost a few thousand tögrög.

DISCOUNT CARDS

An ISIC student card will get a 25% discount on train tickets plus discounts with some tour operators. Check the ISIC website (www.isiccard.com) for updates.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Mongolian Embassies & Consulates

You'll find a full listing of Mongolia's embassies and consulates at www.mongolianconsulate.com.au/mongolia/embassies.shtml.

Embassies & Consulates in Mongolia

A few countries operate embassies in Ulaanbaatar, though for most nationalities the nearest embassies are in Beijing or Moscow. If your country has an embassy in Ulaanbaatar, it's a good idea to register with it if you're travelling into the remote countryside, or in case you lose your passport.

Note that the German embassy also looks after the interests of Dutch, Belgian, Greek and Portuguese citizens. The British embassy handles normal consular duties for most Commonwealth countries.

For details on getting visas for China, Kazakhstan and Russia, see p263.

Austria (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 804; hk_at_ub@maginet.mn; Peace Ave 7)

Canada (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 285; fax 328 289; canada@mongolnet.mn; Bodicom Tower, 7th fl, Sükhbaataryn Gudamj)

China (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 955; fax 311 943; Zaluuchudyn Örgön Chölöö 5) The consular section is actually on Baga Toiruu.

Denmark (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 625; fax 312 175; od@mcs.mn; MCS Plaza, Seoul St)

France (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 519; www.ambafrance-mn.org in French; Peace Ave 3)

Germany (Map pp70-1; ☎ 323 325; fax 312 118; germanemb_ulanbator@mongol.net; Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj 7)

Japan (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 777, 313 332; www.mn.emb-japan.go.jp; Olympiin Gudamj 6)

Kazakhstan (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 240; kzemby@mbox.mn; Apt 11, Diplomatic Services Corps Bldg 95)

Russia (Map pp70-1; ☎ 327 191, 312 851; fax 327 018; www.mongolia.mid.ru; Peace Ave A6)

South Korea (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 548; fax 311 157; www.mofat.go.kr; Olympiin Gudamj 10)

Spain (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 856; fax 324 620; oyunit.gel@yahoo.com; Chamber of Commerce Bldg, Suite 602, Sambugin Örgön Chölöö 11)

Switzerland (Map pp70-1; ☎ 331 422; fax 331 420; www.swissconsulate.mn; Diplomatic Services Bldg 95, 4-36)

UK (Map p64; ☎ 458 133; fax 458 036; britemb@mongol.net; Peace Ave 30)

US (Map p64; ☎ 329 095; <http://ulaanbaatar.usembassy.gov>; Ikh Toiruu 59/1)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

With the exception of Naadam (p96), held on 11 and 12 July, Mongolia has few genuine festivals. The Mairdar Ergekh festival, held at a date according to the lunar calendar (usually August), is a religious festival that used to draw thousands of monks and spectators before it was banned in the 1920s by the communist government. Since being reinstated in 1990, the festival has been held in a different monastery each year. It involves *tsam*-mask dancing and the parading of a statue of the future Buddha (Maitreya) around the monastery. Although small and unpublicised, it's worth asking about, especially if you have an interest in Buddhism.

Ikh Duichin, or Buddha's Birthday, is held on 18 May and marked by *tsam* dancing in Gandan Khiid in Ulaanbaatar and by special services in most other monasteries.

In an effort to boost tourism, travel companies and tourist officials have launched a series of festivals in countryside areas. Some are fairly obscure, such as the Airag Festival in Dundgov aimag, which is held in late August, and the International Gobi Marathon, held in September (www.gobimarathon.com). Others are catching on with both locals and foreigners. The Yak Festival (Arkhangai; early August), the Eagle Festival (Bayan-Ölgii; early October), the Camel Festival (Ömnögov; one week after Tsagaan Sar) and the Sunrise to Sunset 100km run (Khövsgöl Nuur; late June) are worth checking out, especially if you've missed Naadam. See the website of the **Tourism Board** (www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn) for upcoming events.

FOOD

See the Food & Drink chapter (p42) for details on what is on offer, the type of eateries and costs. For this book, expect main dishes to cost T800 to T1500 in budget joints, T2000

to T5000 in midrange places and T6000 to T12,000 in most top-end restaurants.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Mongolia is not a gay-friendly place and not a place to test local attitudes towards homosexuality. While homosexuality is not specifically prohibited, some laws could be interpreted to make it appear illegal. Harassment by police has been reported by the gay and lesbian community, thus it should come as no surprise to hear that Ulaanbaatar's small gay and lesbian community is not well-organised.

Meeting places come and go quickly, so you'll need to quietly tap into the scene and ask. As you never know what sort of reaction you'll get from a Mongolian, try making contacts through the web. Insight can be found at www.globalgayz.com/g-mongolia.html and travel info at www.geocities.com/gaytomonolia/.

HOLIDAYS

Mongolians do not get many holidays. Naadam Festival and Tsagaan Sar warrant three days off each, plus a day off for New Year's. Most tourist facilities remain open during holidays, but shops and offices will close down. The following holidays are observed:

Shin Jil (New Year's Day) 1 January

Constitution Day 13 January; the adoption of the 1992 constitution (generally a normal working day)

Tsagaan Sar (Lunar New Year) January/February; a three-day holiday celebrating the Mongolian New Year (for more information see p44)

Women's Day 8 March (generally a normal working day)

Mothers' & Children's Day 1 June; a great time to visit parks

Naadam Festival 11 & 12 July; also known as National Day celebrations

Mongolian Republic Day 26 November (generally a normal working day)

INSURANCE

A policy covering loss, theft and medical expenses, plus compensation for delays in your travel arrangements, is essential for Mongolia. If items are lost or stolen you'll need to show your insurance company a police report. You may also need to prove damage or injury so take photos. All policies vary so check the fine print. For more on insurance, see p287.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés on nearly every street in downtown Ulaanbaatar; most are identified

with English-language signboards. Nearly all aimag capitals have an internet café in the central Telecom office, and some of the bigger cities also have private internet cafés. A handful of *sum* (district) centres also have internet access. Expect to pay between T400 to T800 per hour at internet cafes, double or triple that for hotel business centres.

Wi-fi (wireless) access is available at some spots in Ulaanbaatar; see the boxed text, p65. If you are staying in an apartment or otherwise have access to a phone line, you can buy a pre-paid card that gives you a dial-up connection. A 10-hour internet card costs T4000 and a 30-hour card costs T6000, but remember that you will also be charged a per-minute fee by the phone company while you are logged on, usually around T15 per minute. The cards can be bought at exchange kiosks in the State Department Store.

There are three internet service providers (Maginet, Bodicom or Micom), of which **Maginet** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 011-312 061; info@maginet.mn; National Information Technology Park, 2nd fl) is the largest. If you live in UB, you can sign up for an ADSL connection. The minimum fee is US\$20 per month for a 128kbps connection (with a US\$40 installation fee). **Ulusnet** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 434; www.ulusnet.mn; Sambugin Gudamj 18) offers internet via WiMax technology, although for now it's prohibitively expensive (US\$270 for the unit alone, US\$110 activation fee, US\$80 per month).

If you are going on a research project in remote areas and need an internet connection (and have a lot of spare cash lying around), it's possible to set up a connection using Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) technology. See www.inmarsat.com/Services/Land/BGAN. The system costs around US\$2800 and the service is US\$40 a month plus US\$6 per megabyte. Monsat (see p260) provides BGAN service. Of course, you'll also need to power your device, which you can do with back-up computer batteries or a solar-powered charger; see Sierra Solar (www.sierrasolar.com).

LEGAL MATTERS

Foreigners' rights are generally respected in Mongolia, although you may bump into the occasional bad cop or customs inspector who won't be satisfied unless they've gotten a piece of what's inside your wallet.

If caught, drug use will give you a peek into Mongolia's grim penitentiary system.

The most common offence committed by foreigners is straying too close to a border without a permit. Violators end up paying a fine and a few unlucky souls have been imprisoned for a few days. If you run into serious trouble, ask to contact your embassy.

Making life difficult is that police often blame the victim; don't expect any sympathy if you've been a victim of a crime or road accident. You're more likely to be scolded about how careless you've been, which can be demoralising. Overall, police are harmless, but unreliable when you really need one.

MAPS

Maps of Mongolia produced outside the country are routinely inaccurate and best avoided. Maps can be ordered from www.shopmongolia.com; otherwise, just wait until you arrive in Ulaanbaatar.

Independent travellers should look out for the 1:1,500,000 *Road Network Atlas* (T15,000) produced by MPM Agency. Another handy map is the 1:2,000,000 *Road Map of Mongolia* (T6000). It has the most accurate road layout and town names and usefully marks the kilometres between all towns.

Also useful is the *Tourist Map of Mongolia* (T6000), which marks a host of obscure historical, archaeological and natural sights, as well as ger camps. On the back it has detailed maps of the areas around Ulaanbaatar, Kharkhorin and Khatgal. Similarly, the *Tourist Map of Ulaanbaatar* (T6000) has a detailed 'around Ulaanbaatar' map on the back. All these maps are updated almost yearly.

Explorers will want to check out the 1:500,000 series of topographic maps, which covers Mongolia in 37 maps. The cost of each varies between T5500 and T7000, but don't count on all being available. The topographic maps are particularly useful if travelling by horse or foot or using a GPS unit, but they can get expensive. A cheaper alternative is a series of all 21 aimag maps (T25,000).

All these maps are available from the Cartography Co Map Shop in Ulaanbaatar (p65). It also sells handy regional maps (T3500 each) to the most popular tourist areas, including Khövsgöl Nuur (1:200,000), Gobi Gurvan Saikhan (1:200,000), Terelj (1:100,000) and the stretch of road between Ulaanbaatar and Kharkhorin (1:500,000).

Conservation Ink (www.conservationink.com) produces maps (US\$8) using satellite images combined with useful information on culture, wildlife and tourist facilities. The national park series includes Altai Tavan Bogd, Khövsgöl Nuur, Gobi Gurvan Saikhan, Gorkhi-Terelj and Khustain Nuruu.

Chinggis Khaan junkies will want to check out the *Chinggis Khaan Atlas*, available around Ulaanbaatar for about T8000, which maps his every presumed movement in obsessive detail. The *Welcome to the Land of Chinggis Khaan* tourist map is a more reasonable survey of Khentii aimag, with good historical detail.

In many Western countries, you can buy the ONC and TPC series of topographical maps published by the Defense Mapping Agency Aerospace Center in the USA. The maps are topographically detailed but dated and are not reliable for place names or road layout. Mongolia is covered by ONC (1:1,000,000) and TPC (1:500,000) maps E-7, E-8, F-7 and F-8. Order from www.omnimap.com.

MONEY

The Mongolian unit of currency is the tögrög (T), which comes in notes of T5, T10, T20, T50, T100, T500, T1000, T5000, T10,000 and T20,000. (T1 notes are basically souvenirs.) There are also T50 and T100 coins. The highest-value note is worth around US\$17.

Banks and exchange offices in Ulaanbaatar will change money with relative efficiency. Banks in provincial centres are also fine; they change dollars and give cash advances against debit and credit cards. However, since they are so remote it's still a good idea to leave the

MONGOLIA'S CURRENCIES

Mongolia's various rulers have ensured a constant change of currencies. During Chinggis Khan's time coins called *sükh*, made from gold and silver, were used as currency. During the Manchurian rule Chinese currency was used but Mongolian traders preferred to use Russian gold, British notes and goods such as tea, silk and fur.

In 1925, four years after independence from China, the tögrög was introduced. At that time, one tögrög was worth US\$0.88 cents; by 1928, one tögrög was worth up to US\$52! Currently, about 1170 tögrög are worth just US\$1.

capital with enough cash to keep you going for a week or so.

When paying out large sums of money (to hotels, tour operators and sometimes airlines) its fine to use either US dollars or tögrögs. Other forms of currency aren't usually accepted, although the euro is probably second best. Cash offers the best exchange rates and you won't be paying any commission charge, but for security purposes you can also use debit cards (travellers cheques are going the way of the dinosaur).

Moneychangers who hang around the markets may or may not be legal. They offer the best rates for US dollars and are usually safe, but the risks are obvious. Remember to change all your tögrög when leaving the country as it's worthless elsewhere.

See the inside front cover for exchange rates at the time of publication and p14 for the costs of everyday items.

ATMs

The Trade and Development Bank has plonked down ATMs at a few key locations in Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet. These ATMs accept Visa and MasterCard and work most of the time, allowing you to withdraw up to T400,000 per day. Because most of the Golomt Bank branches are open 24 hours, they don't have ATMs (just give your card to the teller). Ordinary ATM cards issued from your bank at home probably won't work; try to get a 'debit' card linked to your bank account. It should be associated with a credit card company.

Credit Cards

You can't rely on plastic for everything, but credit cards are becoming more widely accepted in upmarket hotels, travel agencies and antique shops. Most of these, however, charge an additional 3% if you use a credit card. Banks can give cash advances off credit cards, often for no charge if you have Visa, but as much as 4% with MasterCard.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Mongolia's remote and beautiful landscapes make for some incredible photography, but it's this same remoteness that requires extra planning when taking pictures. As you may go several days in a row without seeing a shop, internet café or electrical outlet you'll need extra batteries and memory cards for your

digital camera. These are best bought at home or in Ulaanbaatar as electronic goods in aimg centres can be hard to find. Once you reach an aimg capital you can go to an internet café and burn your pictures to a CD or save them to a storage drive.

If you use film there are several places around Sükhbaatar Sq that will process print film cheaply, but the quality may not be great; it is generally best to wait until you get home. Slide film is rare and expensive, so bring what you need and get it developed when you get home.

In summer, days are long, so the best time to take photos is before 10am and between 6pm and 8pm, when Mongolia basks in gorgeous light. As bright, glaring sunshine is the norm, a polarising filter is essential. If you do a jeep trip on an unsurfaced road, you can expect plenty of dust, so keep the camera well sealed in a plastic bag.

For professional tips on how to take better photos, check out LP's *Travel Photography*, by Richard l'Anson.

Photographing People

Always ask before taking a photograph. Keep in mind that monks and nomads are not photographic models, so if they do not want to be photographed, their wishes should be respected. Point a camera at an urban Mongol on the street and chances are they will cover their face. Don't try sneaking around for a different angle as this may lead to an argument. Markets are often a place where snap-happy foreigners are not welcome.

On the other hand, people in the countryside are often happy to pose for photographs if you ask first. If you have promised to send them a copy, *please* do it, but explain that it may take several months to reach them – some nomads believe that all cameras are (instant) Polaroids. Several nomads also told us how devastated they were because they had not received photos as promised by foreigners. To simplify matters, bring blank envelopes and ask them to write their address on the outside. On the inside, make a note to yourself about who they were in case you forget.

When Mongolians pose for a portrait they instantly put on a face that looks like they are in mourning at Brezhnev's funeral. You may need to take this Soviet-style portrait in order to get a more natural shot later. 'Can I

take your photograph?' in Mongolian is 'Bi tany zurgiiг avчh болoкh uu?'

Restrictions

Photography is prohibited inside monasteries and temples, although you may photograph building exteriors and monastery grounds. You can sometimes obtain special permission to take photographs for an extra fee.

In most museums throughout the country you need to pay an (often outrageously high) extra fee to use your still or video camera. It is best to have a look around first before you decide whether to fork out the extra tögrög.

Don't photograph potentially sensitive areas, especially border crossings and military establishments.

POST

The postal service is reliable but can often be very slow. Allow *at least* a couple of weeks for letters and postcards to arrive home from Mongolia. Foreign residents of Ulaanbaatar find it much faster to give letters (and cash to buy stamps) to other foreigners who are departing.

You won't find letter boxes on the streets. In most cases, you will have to post your letters from the post office. You can buy stamps in post offices (and top-end hotels) in Ulaanbaatar and aimg capitals.

Postal rates are often relatively expensive, especially for parcels, for which there is only an 'airmail' rate – yet they often arrive months later (probably by sea). Normal-sized letters cost T700 and postcards cost T440 to all countries. A 1kg airmail parcel to the UK will cost T14,000, or T18,000 to the USA.

The poste restante at the Central Post Office in Ulaanbaatar seems to work quite well; bring along your passport as proof of identification. Don't even think about using poste restante anywhere else in the country.

Contact details for the more reliable courier services, including DHL and FedEx, are found on p67.

SHOPPING

Mongolia has a number of unique items that are worth bringing home. Cashmere and wool products are usually at the top of the list; Gobi, Goyo and Buyan brands are all

good quality. A cashmere sweater will cost around US\$40 to US\$60.

Antique shops are good for Buddhas, *thangkas* (scroll paintings) and marvellous silver jewellery. For any of these you could pay from a few dollars to several thousand. If you are a serious buyer, ask a local friend to help you shop for the best quality stuff and remember to pick up a certificate of authenticity for customs purposes.

The best place in the country for silver jewellery is Möngön Zaviya (p94). Handmade felt carpets and wall hangings are a speciality from western Mongolia, and you can buy them directly from cooperatives in Khovd and Bayan-Ölgii.

Mongolian clothes such as *dels* (traditional coats), *hurrum* (jackets) and boots are nice to take home; these are available at the State Department Store and Naran Tuul Market. The market also has all the pieces needed for a ger. The problem, of course, is how to ship one home. Try asking Daka at **Happy Pioneer** (☎ 9909 7698; www.yurt-ger-yourte.com).

No matter how many times you're offered them, dinosaur bones and eggs are definitely not souvenirs (legal ones anyway). Please say 'no'.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

The high costs of jeep hire mean that solo budget travellers will need to hook up with others for countryside trips. This usually isn't too much of a problem in summer, when vanloads of backpackers depart daily from the guesthouses in Ulaanbaatar.

In Ulaanbaatar, single travellers on a budget will probably have to go for a dorm bed in a guesthouse, or find another single traveller to share the cost of a double room. Countryside hotels usually have a per bed option. Cycling, camping and hiking trips into the wilderness are safer in twos. If you do go off alone make sure to tell someone of your route and expected time of return.

Solo female travellers get around Ulaanbaatar without any problems. Travelling to the countryside alone can bring hassles from drunk or aggressive Mongolian men. This is not to say it cannot be done (many women do travel alone), but it can be just easier to go with a group or partner. See p264 for more information for solo women travellers.

TELEPHONE

It's easy to make international or domestic calls in Ulaanbaatar. Outside the main cities, making phone calls is a challenge. Aimag capitals are upgrading their systems but in the *sum* centres you'll run head on into WWII-era technology, complete with wind-up phones and operators languishing behind massive metal boards, busily plugging and unplugging wires and shouting '*bain uu?!?*' (is anybody there?!) into the receiver. Fortunately, mobile phone technology is allowing many towns to leapfrog this old technology.

Ulaanbaatar landline phone numbers have six digits, while most countryside numbers have five. Every aimag has its own area code; we have listed them in this book under the aimag capital headings.

If you are calling out of Mongolia and using an IDD phone, just dial ☎ 00 and then your international country code. On non-IDD phones you can make direct long-distance calls by dialling the international operator (☎ 106), who may know enough English to make the right connection (but don't count on it).

The other options are making a call from a private international phone office (*Olon Ulsiin Yariin*), which are becoming common in Ulaanbaatar but not in other cities. These charge reasonable rates to call abroad: T50 per minute to the USA or T100 per minute to Europe. Calls from the central Telecom offices in any city will be more expensive, but not outrageous: T560 per minute to the USA and UK, T820 per minute to Australia. To make the call, you need to pay a deposit in advance (a minimum equivalent of three minutes). Computers are often set up with headsets and Skype (www.skype.com) software.

A couple of the top-end hotels have Home Country Direct dialling, where the push of a button gets you through to international operators in the USA, Japan and Singapore. You can then make a credit-card, charge-card or reverse-charge (collect) call.

Making a call to Mongolia is a lot easier, with one catch. Dial the international access code in your country (normally ☎ 00) and the Mongolian country code (☎ 976). Then, for a landline number dial the local code (minus the '0' for Ulaanbaatar, but include the '0' for all other areas) and then the number. Be aware, though, that there are

different requirements for area codes if using or phoning a mobile phone; see below.

In Ulaanbaatar, the domestic operator's number is ☎ 1109.

Mobile & Satellite Phones

The three main companies are Mobicom, Skytel and Unitel. The mobile-phone network is the standard GSM (Global System for Mobile communication). If you bring a GSM phone you can get a new SIM card installed in Mongolia. The process is simple – just go to a mobile-phone office (a Mobicom office is located on the 3rd floor of the State Department Store), sign up for basic service (around T15,000), and buy units as needed. Cards come in units of 10 (T2500), 30 (T6600), 50 (T10,250) and 100 (T19,000). It is free to receive calls and text messaging charges are almost negligible. If you are abroad, and calling a mobile-phone number in Mongolia, just dial the country code (☎ 976) without the area code. Note that you drop the '0' off the area code if dialling an Ulaanbaatar number from a mobile phone but you retain the '0' if using other area codes.

Every aimag capital (and a few *sum* centres including Kharkhorin, Khujirt and Tariat) has a mobile-phone service, and calls are fairly cheap, making this a good way to keep in touch with home.

New and used mobile phone shops are everywhere in UB and also in some rural cities. It's a good idea to have a phone while travelling in the countryside as it allows you to communicate with your tour operator should problems arise on your trip.

Note that if you have a GPRS phone (General Packet Radio Service) you can access the internet with a normal SIM card.

If you are planning a serious mountaineering or horse-trekking expedition, considering bringing or renting a satellite phone, which isn't too bulky and can be used anywhere. A local company, **Monsat** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 011-323 705, 9120 6050; www.monsat.mcs.mn; MCS Plaza, Seoul St, Ulaanbaatar), rents 'sat' phones for US\$5 to US\$10 per day depending on the model. Calls are an additional US\$1.65 per minute to the USA or Europe.

Phone Cards

If you have access to a private phone and need to make international calls, the easiest option is to buy an international phone card, sold in

various outlets including the post office, State Department Store or mobile-phone shops. Instructions for the card are in Mongolian, but you can ask at the post office for English instructions. The Personal Identification Number (PIN) for these cards is the last four digits of the code on the card. Be careful where you scratch off the code, poachers can peek over your shoulder, steal the code and use it before you do (which has happened at the post office).

There are a variety of phone cards available, and you usually get what you pay for; the cheaper ones (such as Bodicom) have terrible sound quality and echo, but cost less than US\$0.10 per minute.

TIME

Mongolia is divided into two time zones: the three western aimag of Bayan-Ölgii, Uvs and Khovd are one hour behind Ulaanbaatar and the rest of the country. Mongolia does not observe daylight-saving time, which means that the sun can rise at very early hours in summer.

The standard time in Ulaanbaatar is UTC/GMT plus eight hours. When it is noon in Ulaanbaatar, it is also noon in Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and Perth; 2pm in Sydney; 8pm the previous day in Los Angeles; 11pm the previous day in New York; and 4am in London. See the world time-zone map on pp310–11. The 24-hour clock is used for plane and train schedules.

TOILETS

In most hotels in Ulaanbaatar, aimag capitals and in most ger camps, toilets are the sit-down European variety. In other hotels and some more remote ger camps, you will have to use pit toilets and hold your breath.

MARGASH & YOU

There is another form of 'Mongolian time': add two hours' waiting time to any appointments you make. Mongolians are notorious for being late, and this includes nearly everyone likely to be important to you, such as jeep drivers, your guide or the staff at a museum you want to visit. You could almost adjust your watch to compensate for the difference. The Mongolian version of '*mañana*' (tomorrow) is *margash*.

In the countryside, where there may not be a bush or tree for hundreds of kilometres, modesty is not something to worry about – just do it where you want to, but away from gers. Also, try to avoid such places as *ovoos* (sacred cairns of stones), rivers and lakes (water sources for nomads) and marmot holes.

The plumbing is decrepit in many of the older hotels, and toilet paper can easily jam up the works. If there is a rubbish basket next to the toilet, this is where the waste paper should go. Most of the toilet paper in hotels resembles industrial-strength cardboard, or may be pages torn from Soviet-era history books or recently distributed bibles. To avoid paper cuts, stock up on softer brand toilet paper, available in the larger cities.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Handy tourist information desks are available at Ulaanbaatar's Central Post Office, Discovery Mongolia Information Centre, train station and airport. They all stock books, maps and brochures and have English-speaking staff. Outside UB, the only similar tourist desk is in Mörön. In Mandalgov, the Ger to Ger office acts as an information desk, and in Bayan-Ölgii, the Strictly Protected Areas office does the same.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Mongolia is a difficult place for wheelchair travellers as most buildings and buses are not wheelchair accessible, and in addition there are rough roads and generally poor standards of accommodation. Still, travel to Ulaanbaatar and jeep trips to places such as Kharkhorin shouldn't cause too many insurmountable problems.

If any specialised travel agency might be interested in arranging trips to Mongolia, the best bet is the US company **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800-846-4537; fax 610-521 6959; www.disabilitytravel.com) in Pennsylvania. At the very least, hire your own transport and guide through one of the Ulaanbaatar agencies (see p80). If you explain your disability, these agencies may be able to accommodate you.

The following organisations offer general travel advice for the disabled but provide no specific information on Mongolia.

Holiday Care Service (☎ 0845-124 9974; www.holidaycare.org.uk; The Hawkins Suite, Enham Place, Andover SP11 6JS, UK) British holiday and travel information service for disabled and older people.

Mobility International USA (☎ 541-343-1284; www.miusa.org; 132 E. Broadway, Suite 343, Eugene, OR 97401, USA) Organises international exchanges.

Nican (☎ 02-6241 1220; www.nican.com.au; Unit 5, 48 Brookes St, Mitchell, ACT 2911, Australia) Australian organisation which provides information on recreation, tourism, sports and the arts for disabled people.

SATH (Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped; ☎ 212-447-0027; www.sath.org) This US website contains tips on how to travel with diabetes, arthritis, visual and hearing impairments, and wheelchairs.

For general advice, bulletin boards and searchable databases try the following websites:

Access-able Travel Source (www.access-able.com) Provides access information for mature and disabled travellers.

New Mobility Magazine (www.newmobility.com) An excellent online resource for disability culture and lifestyle.

VISAS

Currently, a 30-day tourist visa is easily obtained at any Mongolian embassy consulate, consulate-general or honorary consuls.

To get a visa for longer than 30 days, you must be invited or sponsored by a Mongolian citizen, foreign resident (expat) or Mongolian company, or be part of an organised tour. It is therefore possible to get a 90-day visa for most nationalities; you just need to pay the inviting agency a fee of around US\$30 (most guesthouses can do this).

If you cannot get to a Mongolian consulate, you can pick up a 30-day tourist visa on arrival at the airport in Ulaanbaatar or at the land borders of Zamyn-Üüd and Sükhbaatar. You'll need US\$53 and two passport photos.

Israeli and Malaysian citizens can stay visa-free for up to 30 days and Hong Kong and Singaporean citizens can stay visa-free for up to 14 days.

US citizens can stay in Mongolia for up to 90 days without a visa. If you stay less than 30 days nothing needs to be done, other than having your passport stamped when you enter and leave the country.

All visitors who plan to stay *more* than 30 days must be registered within seven days of your arrival (see p264).

Mongolian honorary consuls can issue transit visas and nonextendable tourist visas but only for 14 days from the date of entry. However, these visas are for entry only; they cannot issue normal entry/exit visas, so you will have to spend some of your precious

time in Ulaanbaatar arranging an exit visa (see opposite) from the **Office of Immigration, Naturalization & Foreign Citizens** (INFC; Map pp70-1; ☎ 011-315 323; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), on the west side of Peace Bridge, opposite Naran Plaza. Note that on Wednesday it's only open in the afternoon.

To check current regulations, try the website of the Mongolian embassy in Washington DC at www.mongolianembassy.us.

For information on getting visas to China, Kazakhstan or Russia from Mongolia, see opposite.

Tourist Visas

Standard tourist visas generally last 30 days from the date of entry and you must enter Mongolia within three months of issue. Tourist visas usually cost US\$25 for a single entry/exit, though there may be a 'service fee'. Each embassy or consulate sets its own price. For single entry/exit visas you can expect to pay: A\$65 in Sydney, UK£40 in London, C\$80 in Ottawa and Y270 in Beijing.

Visas normally take several days, or even up to two weeks, to issue. If you want your visa quicker, possibly within 24 hours, you will have to pay an 'express fee', which is double the normal cost. If you want to stay longer than 30 days, tourist visas can be extended in Ulaanbaatar (see below).

Multiple-entry/exit tourist visas (which cost US\$65 and are valid for six months after the date of issue) are usually only issued to foreign residents who do a lot of travel.

Transit Visas

These visas last 72 hours from the date of entry. This period will only allow you to get off the Trans-Mongolian train for a very short time before catching another train to Russia or China. A single-entry/exit transit visa costs US\$15 (US\$30 for express service), but cannot be extended. (As with the tourist visas, the fee varies by embassy.) You will need to show the train or plane ticket and a visa for the next country (Russia or China).

Visa Extensions

If you have a 30-day tourist visa you can extend it by another 30 days. For extensions, go to the INFC office (left). The only catch is that if you stay longer than 30 days you have to be registered at this office (see opposite).

VISAS FOR ONWARD TRAVEL

China

The consular section of the Chinese embassy in Ulaanbaatar is a good place to get a visa for China. It is open from 9.30am to noon Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Transit visas (single or double entry) last up to seven days from each date of entry. Single- and double-entry tourist visas are valid for 30 days from the date of each entry and you must enter China within 90 days of being issued the visa. Single-/double-entry tourist visas cost US\$30/60 and take a week to issue. For three-day or same-day service, you'll have to fork out an extra US\$50 or US\$60. You must pay in US dollars. Visas for US citizens are US\$100, regardless of type.

In the summer of 2007, travellers reported being able to get a visa on the spot at the border in Erlian. Only time will tell if this becomes standard practice so ask around or check lonelyplanet.com's Thorn Tree travel forum.

Kazakhstan

The Kazakhstan embassy is open from 10am to noon and 3pm to 5pm Monday to Friday. Single-entry, one-month visas cost US\$65 and take five days to process (or pay double to get it the next day). A double-entry, three-month visa costs US\$100. A multiple-entry visa valid for one year costs US\$205.

Russia

Getting a visa is by no means a straightforward process, but is not impossible. The consular section is open for visas from 2pm to 3pm daily. Almost everyone ends up paying a different price for their visa; costs vary between US\$25 and US\$200 depending on your itinerary and nationality. You will need three photos, an invitation or sponsor, and possibly vouchers for hotels. You can get a visa for 21 days but not more than that. You will also need 'health insurance', which local agents can organise for about US\$1 per day. A visa normally takes a couple of days to issue or, if 'urgent', it can be issued on the spot for double the normal cost. However, your tour agent will need around 10 days to get the vouchers, so start the process early. If you need vouchers the consular will give you directions to a travel agent (usually Legend Tours; see p67). For additional support, contact: <http://waytorussia.net>.

The INFC office is a branch of the main visa office of the **Ministry of External Relations** (Map pp70-1; cnr Peace Ave & Olympiin Gudamj; ☎ 9.30am-noon Mon-Fri). You may be sent to the Ministry if your visa situation is complicated (ie you require a work permit). The entrance is around the back.

If you have already registered, you should apply for an extension about a week before your visa expires. It costs US\$15 for the first seven days and a further US\$2 per day for up to an additional 23 days (they may otherwise charge a flat T3000 per day). You will need a passport-sized photo and must pay a T5000 processing fee. It should take two or three days to process. If you can't wait you can leave the passport here, but must pick it up four days before the first 30 day visa expires. For an extra US\$20 you can get one-day service.

Several guesthouses in Ulaanbaatar will take care of visa extensions (and registration) for a small fee. If you don't have a letter of

support you can write your own (handwritten is OK); the letter should state the date of your arrival, the date of extension and the reason for travel.

Getting a visa extension outside of Ulaanbaatar is difficult, as they would need to send your passport back to Ulaanbaatar. In an extreme situation this might be possible at the INFC office in Ölgii.

Exit Visas

Transit and tourist visas are good for one entry and one exit (unless you have a double or multiple-entry/exit visa). If you are working in Mongolia, or if you obtained your visa at an honorary consul, you are usually issued a single-entry visa (valid for entry only). In this case, another visa is required to *leave* the country. These visas are available from the INFC office (see opposite). For most nationalities the exit visa costs around US\$20 and for US citizens it is US\$100 (plus an additional

US\$3 processing fee). It is valid for 10 days, which means that you can stay 10 days after your normal visa has expired. The exit visa situation in particular applies to Israeli and US passport holders (who usually enter without visas). Israelis need an exit visa if they stay more than 30 days and Americans need one if they stay more than 90 days.

Registration

If you intend to stay in Mongolia for more than 30 days you must register with the police in Ulaanbaatar before the end of your first 30 days of being in the country. (US passport holders must register within the first seven days.)

Registration takes place at the INFC office. The process is free, but you have to pay T1200 for the one-page application. You'll need one passport-sized photo. Most guesthouses can rustle up an invitation to Mongolia for you if you require one.

As a formality, the registration also needs to be 'signed out', almost as if you were checking out of a hotel; however, the official you are dealing with will usually do this when you register so you won't have to come back. A specific date is not needed, just set the exit date as far out as possible and you can leave anytime before that date.

If you've arrived from Russia to western Mongolia, the INFC office in Ölgii (p224) can get you registered.

If you don't register, you are liable for a fine (theoretically from US\$100 to US\$300) when you leave the country.

Long-Term Stays

The only way to remain in Mongolia on a long-term basis (ie more than three months) is to get a work or study permit. The company or organisation you are working for should handle this for you, but if you are working independently you need to go it alone. In most cases, with a letter from your employer, you can get your stuff done at the INFC office. The staff may send you to the **Labour Registration Department** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 011-260 376, 260 363) in the Supreme Court building on Sambuugiin Örgön Chölöö. Independent researchers and students are usually registered through the Ministry of Enlightenment (in Mongolian 'Shinjileh Uhaan Bolovsroliin Yam'), in a building behind the Ulaanbaatar Hotel.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Mongolia doesn't present too many problems for foreign women travelling independently. The majority of Mongolian men behave in a friendly and respectful manner, without ulterior motives. However, you may come across an annoying drunk or the occasional macho idiot. The phrase for 'Go away!' is 'Sasha bel!'

There are occasional incidents of solo female travellers reporting being harassed by their male guide. If your guide is male, it is best to keep in touch with your tour agency in Ulaanbaatar, perhaps making contingency plans with them if things go awry (have a mobile phone with a local SIM card). Better yet, take a female guide whenever possible.

Tampons and pads are available in Ulaanbaatar and other main cities such as Darkhan and Erdenet, though these will be very hard to find the deeper you go into the countryside. Many women also find it useful to wear long skirts while in the countryside, so that they can relieve themselves in some semblance of privacy on the open steppes.

Although attitudes towards women are more conservative in the mostly Muslim Bayan-Ölgii aimag, you don't need to cover up as you would in other areas of Central Asia.

WORK

Mongolia is certainly not somewhere you can just turn up and expect to get paid employment – the demand is not high even for teaching English. Also, if you do get work the pay will be poor (possibly the same as the locals), unless you can score a job with a development agency, but these agencies usually recruit their non-Mongolian staff in their home country, not from within Mongolia.

If you are keen to work in Mongolia and are qualified in teaching or health, contact the organisations listed opposite, network through the internet or check the English-language newspapers in Ulaanbaatar.

Permission to work is fairly easy to obtain if you have been hired locally. In most cases, your employer will take care of this for you. See also Long-Term Stays on left.

For any project you get involved with, ask the organisation to put you in touch with former volunteers or workers to get a better idea of what you may be in for.

Language Teaching

Some Mongolians want to forget Russian and learn a useful European language, particularly English, so there is a demand (albeit low) for teachers. Colleges and volunteer agencies are, however, on the lookout for qualified teachers who are willing to stay for a few terms (if not a few years), but not just for a week or two. Contact the voluntary-service agencies in your home country or the ones listed below.

Informal, short-term work may be possible through smaller organisations, such as the many private universities that have sprung up, or you may be able to do freelance tutoring for a while, but don't expect to make much money. In Ulaanbaatar try the **Mongolian Knowledge University** (☎ 011-327 165; fax 011-358 354), the **Ikhs Zasag University** (☎ 011-457 855), the **International School** (☎ 011-452 839; www.isumongolia.edu.mn), the **Turkish School** (☎ 9978 0173) or **Orchlon** (☎ 011-353 519; www.orchlon.mn).

Volunteer Work

Some organisations are anxious to receive help from qualified people, particularly in education, health and IT development. Agencies are more interested in committed people who are willing to stay two years or more, although short-term projects are available. In most instances, you will be paid in local wages (or possibly a little more). Besides the following,

a good starting reference is **Golden Gate Friends of Mongolia** (www.ggfom.org).

Asral (☎ 011-304 838; fax 011-304 898; www.asralmongolia.org; PO Box 467, Ulaanbaatar-23) Travellers can volunteer as English teachers at this Buddhist social centre or work on the project farm in Gachuurt.

Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA; ☎ 03-9279 1788; fax 03-9419 4280; osb@osb.org.au; PO Box 350, Fitzroy Vic 3065) AVA has a handful of Australian volunteers in Mongolia.

Itgel Foundation (☎ 9972 2667; www.itgel.org) Organisation that assists the Tsaatan people in Khövsgöl. Various opportunities from IT support to veterinary assistance.

Khustain National Park (www.ecovolunteer.org) The park runs a three-week eco-volunteer programme where you can help with research.

Peace Corps (Enkh Tavniin Korpus; ☎ 011-311 520) The organisation is well represented throughout the country. Alternatively, contact your local Peace Corps office in the USA (☎ 1-800-424 858, 202-606 3970; fax 606 3110; www.peacecorps.gov).

UN Development Program (UNDP; ☎ 011-327 585; fax 011-326 221; PO Box 46/1009, Ulaanbaatar, Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj 12) The UNDP is always on the lookout for committed and hard-working volunteers but normally recruits abroad.

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO; ☎ /fax 011-313 514; vsomongolia@magicnet.mn; PO Box 678, Ulaanbaatar) This British-run organisation is set up mainly for Brits. It prefers you to contact the organisation through its UK head office (☎ 020-8780 2266; fax 020-8780 1326; 317 Putney Bridge Rd, London SW15 2PN).

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

When entering Mongolia, by land or air, you should fill out straightforward immigration and customs forms. You shouldn't have to pay anything if your visa is in order (see p262 for visa information). You'll have to register if you plan to be in Mongolia for more than 30 days; see p264 for details. Registering in Ulaanbaatar is fairly straightforward, and it's also possible in Ölgii if you arrive in western Mongolia.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Passport

Make sure that your passport is valid for at least six more months from the date of arrival. If you lose your passport, your embassy in Ulaanbaatar can replace it, usually in one day. Before leaving Mongolia, check whether you'll need an exit visa from the Office of Immigration, Naturalization & Foreign Citizens (INFC; p262).

AIR Airports & Airlines

Ulaanbaatar's **Chinggis Khaan airport** (☎ 011-983 005) is Mongolia's major international airport; the code is ULN. Because the runway was built on a slope, landings are one-shot deals for modern jets. There are constant rumours of a new international airport in Töv aimag, though nothing has been established formally.

The only other airport with international flights is Ölgii, which is connected to Almaty (Kazakhstan).

Mongolia's national airline, MIAT, has brought its safety practices for international flights to near Western standards (domestic flights are a different story altogether). Online booking is available through its website. On international flights, MIAT allows 30kg of baggage for business travellers and 20kg for economy travellers.

Most people fly in from Beijing, Berlin or Moscow; there are additional nonstop flights from Osaka and Seoul. Current airline schedules also allow you to fly from Ulaanbaatar to Irkutsk, on Lake Baikal in Russia, and Hohhot (Khökh Khot), the capital of the autonomous region of Chinese Inner Mongolia.

In July and August, most flights are full, so book well in advance.

Airlines flying to and from Mongolia:
Aero Mongolia (airline code MNG; ☎ 9191 2903; www.aeromongolia.mn)
Aeroflot (airline code SU; ☎ 011-320 720; www.aeroflot.com)
Air China (airline code CA; ☎ 011-328 838; www.airchina.cn)
Korean Air (airline code KE; ☎ 011-326 643; www.koreanair.com)
MIAT (airline code OM; ☎ 011-322 118; <http://miat.com>)

HANDY TIPS FOR AIR TRAVEL

Tip one: your luggage weight is determined by the airline with which you begin your journey, not any middle segment or final segment. So if you are flying from the US it doesn't matter that MIAT's baggage allowance is only 20kg or 30kg; you can bring as much as your original flight allows. (This applies if you check your baggage all the way through, but won't work if you have a long layover en route.)

Tip two: when changing planes in Beijing, your luggage will arrive on the carousel but you don't need to haul it back upstairs when you check in with MIAT/Air China. An attendant downstairs will collect onward baggage and send it to your next flight.

Tip three: if you have an onward ticket for Mongolia, you can stay in Beijing for 24 hours without a visa (despite what any Chinese embassy might tell you). Luggage storage is available at the airport if you need to spend the night in town.

Tickets

Full-time students and people aged under 26 years (under 30 in some countries) have access to better deals than other travellers. You have to show a document proving your date of birth or a valid International Student Identity Card (ISIC) when buying your ticket.

Most travel agencies will offer discounted tickets to Beijing and Moscow but not to Ulaanbaatar. In fact, unless you buy a through-ticket with Aeroflot or Air China you will find it hard to even book a Moscow-Ulaanbaatar or Beijing-Ulaanbaatar ticket from abroad. The solution is to buy e-tickets from MIAT's website.

Australia & New Zealand

Flights to Mongolia go via Seoul or Beijing. The cheapest return flights from Sydney to Ulaanbaatar, on Korean Air, go for about A\$1990. Low-season return fares to Beijing from the east coast of Australia start at around A\$1080. The lowest fares are offered by Vietnam Airlines. Useful travel agencies:

Flight Centre (☎ in Australia 133 133, in New Zealand 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.com)

STA Travel (☎ in Australia 1300 733 035, in New Zealand 0800 474 400; www.statravel.com)

China

From Beijing there are daily flights on either Air China or MIAT. Between 15 April and 15 September MIAT flies to Beijing daily except Friday for US\$191/341 one way/return. At other times flights are limited to Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Air China has six flights per week (three in winter) from Beijing for the same price. Air China's one-way flight is US\$349 at the full fare, but an advance ticket (booked two or three weeks ahead) is US\$192.

Note that you'll need a double-entry visa to return to China, or you'll have to buy one in Ulaanbaatar. Travellers without a Chinese visa have been refused boarding flights to Beijing. **MIAT** (☎ in Beijing 8610-6507 9297) has an office in Room 705 on the 7th floor of Sunjoy Mansion, opposite the Beijing International Club, just off Jianguomenwai Dajie.

Aero Mongolia flies to/from Hohhot in China on Monday and Thursday for US\$180/280. It also flies to/from Tianjin on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday for a reasonable US\$150/241; the ticket comes with a free bus transfer to Beijing.

Travel agencies include the following:
BTG Ticketing Co (☎ 8610-6515 8010; www.btgravel.com)

China International Travel Service (CITS) (☎ 010-6512 0507; www.cits.net)

Continental Europe

Most Europeans generally fly to Mongolia from Moscow (see Russia, p268) or Berlin on either MIAT or Aeroflot. The fare to/from Berlin is US\$601/929 one way/return on MIAT and US\$886/971 on Aeroflot.

Fares to Beijing from Western Europe are similar to those from London (see UK, p268).

Some travel agencies to check out:
CTS Viaggi (☎ 06-462 0431; www.cts.it) Italian company that specialises in student and youth travel.
NBBS Reizen (☎ 0900 10 20 300; www.nbbs.nl) in Dutch Branches in most Dutch cities.
Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) Many branches in Paris and throughout France.
STA Travel (☎ in Paris 01 43 59 23 69, in Frankfurt 069-430 1910; www.statravel.com) Branches across much of Europe.

Japan & Korea

In summer, MIAT flies to/from Tokyo on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday (US\$471/706 one way/return), to/from Osaka on Friday (US\$406/794), and to Seoul daily in summer for US\$381/498. Korean Air flies daily to Seoul for US\$379/493. For travel agencies try the following:

No 1 Travel (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp)

Kazakhstan

Border junkies may be interested in this obscure route into Mongolia. Trans Ölgii flies from Almaty to Ölgii via Üst Kamenogorsk on Wednesday morning. One-way flights cost about US\$300. For information on flying in the other direction, see p227. Remember that after arriving in Ölgii, you'll need to get your passport registered within seven days if you plan on staying in Mongolia for more than 30 days. The police in Ölgii can do this.

Russia

Aeroflot has four flights a week between Ulaanbaatar and Moscow (US\$450/580 one way/return). MIAT flies to Moscow (US\$361/587) on Tuesday and Sunday, continuing to Berlin and returning the same day. MIAT also flies to/from Irkutsk on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for US\$117/200.

Aero Mongolia flies to Irkutsk on Tuesday and Friday (US\$150/250).

UK & Ireland

To Beijing, low-season return fares from London start at £720 with Air China (flying direct). Aeroflot flies Ulaanbaatar to London on Friday for £563 one way, with a change of planes but no overnight stay or airport transfer required. The Saturday connection is not as convenient as it entails a night in Moscow at your own expense.

Agencies to try include:

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245 608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) North-South Travel donates part of its profits to projects in the developing world.

STA Travel (☎ 0870 163 0026; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.com)

USA & Canada

The cheapest fares to Ulaanbaatar are from San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York on Korean Air, Air China, Northwest Airlines and United Airlines. From the US west/east coast, return fares start at US\$1750/2000, unless you use the cheaper Air Bridge (see opposite). Bear in mind that ticket prices from the US can fluctuate wildly depending on the month and day of travel (sometimes

by hundreds of dollars). Return high-season fares between Toronto and Ulaanbaatar are around C\$2200.

Agencies include the following:

Air Bridge (☎ 1-303-757-1929; www.airbridgeusa.com)

The US office for Ulaanbaatar-based AirTrans offers the cheapest tickets to Mongolia (return fares from US\$1580 (west coast) to US\$1730 (east coast). The company accepts payment by PayPal.

Orbitz (☎ 888-656-4546; www.orbitz.com)

STA Travel (☎ 800-777-0112; www.statravel.com)

Offices in Boston, Chicago, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and other major cities.

Travel CUTS (☎ 1-866-246-9762; www.travelcuts.com) Canada's national student travel agency, which has offices in all major cities.

LAND

There are two main land border crossings open to foreigners: Ereen (Erenhot or Èrliàn in Chinese) and Zamyn-Üüd, on the Chinese–Mongolian border, and Naushki and Sükhbaatar, on the Russian–Mongolian border. It's possible to cross borders by minivan or train, though the latter is the more common and convenient option. There are also other border crossings between Russia and Mongolia; see p274.

China

BORDER CROSSINGS

The only border open to foreigners is the one between Zamyn-Üüd and Ereen. It's open daily but note that on holidays only the train (not the road) crossing will operate.

In 2007 travellers were reporting that it was possible to get a Chinese visa at the border, but until this becomes a regular thing it's best to have a visa already in your passport. If you are heading for Mongolia and need a visa, there is a **Mongolian consulate** (☎ /fax 479-7539200; Weijian Binguan Er Lou, Bldg 206; ☎ 8.30am–noon Mon–Fri) a 10-minute walk past the main long-distance bus station in Ereen; a taxi will take you there for Y3. The consulate can process a visa in one day for US\$55.

If you are taking the direct train between China and Mongolia you will have up to three hours to kill in Ereen. You can buy snacks for the train at the market or one of the well-stocked shops. Many of the shop signs are in Cyrillic Mongolian for the benefit of the many traders that come here. There are money-changers and banks in and around the station. If you're going to China and still have tögrög,

change it here or you'll be keeping it as a souvenir. If you need to spend the night there are some cheap and reliable hotels opposite the train station.

Zamyn-Üüd, on the Mongolian side, is not an interesting place, so you aren't missing anything if the train stops in the middle of the countryside (usually in the middle of the night), and not at Zamyn-Üüd. Mongolian customs and immigration officials take about two hours to do their stuff.

Remember that if you are carrying on to central China there is absolutely no need to go to Beijing first. From Ereen you can travel on to the rail junction at Datong and then catch trains or buses to Pingyao, Xi'an and beyond. Read Lonely Planet's *China* guide for details on connections from Datong.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

As long as your papers are in order there is no trouble crossing the Chinese–Mongolian border in your own car. Driving around Mongolia is a lot easier compared with China, where drivers require a guide and Chinese driving permit.

MINIVAN

Minivans shuttle between the train stations of Zamyn-Üüd, on Mongolia's southern border, and Ereen, the Chinese border town. For details see p203.

TRAIN

Mongolia has trains to both Russia and China. Getting a ticket in Ulaanbaatar can be very difficult during the summer tourist season, so you need to plan ahead.

The yellow International Railway Ticketing Office (Map p64) is about 200m northwest of the train station. Inside the office, specific rooms sell tickets to Beijing, Irkutsk (Russia), Moscow, and Ereen and Hohhot (both in China), but as a foreigner you'll be directed to a **foreigners' booking office** (☎ 24133, inquiries 243 848; Room 212; ☎ 8am–7pm). It's upstairs and staff here speak some English. On weekends you can use the downstairs booking desk. You'll need your passport to buy a ticket. You can book the ticket by phone for a T4500 booking fee. If you cancel a ticket there is a minuscule T1000 charge. There is no departure tax if travelling on the train.

You can book a ticket for international trains out of Ulaanbaatar up to one month

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & climate change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel. For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

TRAVEL AGENCIES & ORGANISED TOURS

In this section we list reliable agencies outside Mongolia that can help with the logistics of travel in Mongolia, including visas, excursions or the whole shebang. These include travel agencies, adventure-tour operators and homestay agencies. The following can hook you up with tickets, individual itineraries or group packages. For Ulaanbaatar-based travel companies, see p80.

The largest travel company specialising in Mongolia is **Juulchin** (www.juulchin.com), the former state company that has gone private. Juulchin has offices in Beijing, Berlin, Tokyo, Seoul and New Jersey.

Asia

Monkey Business Shrine (☎ 8610-6591 6519; www.monkeyshrine.com; Room 201, Poachers Inn, 43 Beisanlitun Nan, Chao Yang District, 100027, Beijing)

Moonsky Star Ltd (☎ 852-2723 1376; www.monkeyshrine.com; Flat D, 11th fl, Liberty Mansion, 26E Jordan Rd, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong)

STA Travel Bangkok (☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2736 1618; www.statravel.com.hk); Japan (☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp); Singapore (☎ 65-6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg)

Australia

Intrepid Travel (☎ 03-9473 2626; www.intrepidtravel.com.au; 11 Spring St, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065)

Peregrine Adventures (☎ 03-9663 8611; www.peregrine.net.au; 258 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, Victoria 3000)

UK & Continental Europe

Discovery Initiatives (☎ 01285-643333; www.discoveryinitiatives.com; Travel House, 51 Castle St, Cirencester, GL7 1QD, UK) Runs environmentally friendly conservation trips to Khövsgöl, the Gobi and elsewhere, in cooperation with local scientists.

Equitour (☎ 061-303 3105; www.equitour.com; Herrenweg, 60 CH-4123 Allschwil, Switzerland) Specialises in horse-riding tours.

Exodus (☎ 020-8675 5550; www.exodus.co.uk; 9 Weir Rd, London SW12 0LT, UK)

In the Saddle (☎ 01299-272 997; www.inthesaddle.co.uk; Reaside, Neen Savage, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 8ES, UK) Runs horse-riding tours.

KE Adventure (☎ 017687-73966; www.keadventure.com; 32 Lake Rd, Keswick, Cumbria CA12 5DQ, UK) Organises mountain-biking tours and guided ascents of Tavan Bogd Uul.

Mongolei Reisen GmbH (☎ 3303-214 552; www.mongoliajourneys.com; Am Spargelfeld 3, 16540 Hohen Neuendorf, Berlin, Germany)

Off the Map Tours (☎ 0116-2402625; www.mongolia.co.uk; 20 The Meer, Fleckney, Leicester, LE8 8UN) A Mongolia specialist with motorbiking, mountain-biking, horse-riding and hiking trips.

USA & Canada

Boojum Expeditions (☎ 1-800-287-0125, 406-587-0125; www.boojum.com; 14543 Kelly Canyon Rd, Bozeman, MT 59715) Offers horse-riding, mountain-biking, fishing and trekking trips. In Ulaanbaatar, Boojum's local office is called Khövsgöl Lodge Company.

Geographic Expeditions (☎ 1-800-777-8183, 415-922-0448; www.geoex.com; 2nd fl, 1008 General Kennedy Ave, San Francisco, CA 94129) Horse-riding trips to Khentii and jeep trips combining western Mongolia and Tuva in western Siberia.

Hidden Trails (☎ 604-323-1141; www.hidden-trails.com; 659A Moberly Rd, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4B3) Horse-riding tours to Tereji and Darkhad Depression, in conjunction with Equitour.

Mir Corporation (☎ 1-800-424-7289; www.mircorp.com; Suite 210, 85 South Washington St, Seattle, WA 98104)

Nomadic Expeditions (☎ 1-800-998-6634, 609-860-9008; www.nomadicexpeditions.com; Suite 20A, 1095 Cranbury-South River Rd, Jamesburg, NJ 08831) One of the best Mongolia specialists, offering everything from palaeontology trips to eagle hunting and camel trekking. It also has an office in Ulaanbaatar.

Turtle Tours (☎ 888-299-1439; www.turtletours.com; PO Box 1147, Carefree, AZ 85377)

Steppes East (☎ 01285-880 980; www.steppeseast.co.uk; 51 Castle St, Cirencester, GL7 1QD, UK)

in advance, but for the Moscow–Beijing or Beijing–Moscow trains you will have to scramble for a ticket on the day before departure (although you could try asking two days in advance). If you have trouble booking a berth, ask your guesthouse manager or hotel reception desk for assistance.

A taxi between Sükhbaatar Sq and the train station costs about T900.

It's also possible to buy train tickets at the Discovery Mongolia Information Centre (see p67).

Refer to the boxed text on p275 for international train services.

Direct Trains

Most travellers catch the direct train between Beijing and Ulaanbaatar.

There are two direct trains a week each way between Beijing and Ulaanbaatar. One of these (3 and 4) is the Trans-Mongolian train, which runs between Beijing and Moscow. The other (23 and 24) is easier to get tickets for.

It is also possible to travel directly between Ulaanbaatar and Hohhot twice a week, allowing you to either bypass Beijing completely or catch a train or flight (US\$80) on to Beijing from there.

Trains leave from **Beijing Train Station** (☎ 6563 3262/42). If your luggage weighs over 35kg, on the day before departure you'll have to take it to the Luggage Shipment Office, which is on the right-hand side of the station. The excess is charged at about US\$11 per 10kg, with a maximum excess of 40kg allowed.

The best place to buy tickets in China is at the **China International Travel Service** (CITS; ☎ 010-6512 0507; www.cits.net; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 1.30–5pm) in the International Hotel, Jianguomenwai Dajie, Beijing. Tickets are also available at **BTG Travel & Tours** (☎ 010-6800 5588; Beijing Tourism Bldg, 28 Jianguomenwai Dajie), between the New Otani and Gloria Plaza hotels.

With CITS it is possible to book up to six months in advance for trains originating in Beijing if you send a deposit of Y100, and you can collect your ticket from one week to one day before departure. There is a Y150 cancellation fee.

CITS only sells tickets from Beijing to Moscow or Ulaanbaatar – no stopovers are allowed. Tickets to Ulaanbaatar cost Y657/1006 in hard/soft sleeper on the Saturday train and Y595/999 in hard/soft sleeper on the Wednesday train.

You can also buy train tickets privately; they will be more expensive than at CITS, but you may also be able to arrange a stopover and visas. In Beijing, **Monkey Business Shrine** (☎ 8610-6591 6519; fax 6591 6517; www.monkeyshrine.com) can put together all kinds of stopovers and homestay programs. The company has a lot of experience in booking international trains for independent travellers. In Hong Kong, it goes under the name **Moonsky Star Ltd** (☎ 852-2723 1376; fax 2723 6653).

Note that the Russian embassy in Beijing is only accepting visa applications from official residents of China. You are more likely to get a visa from the Russian consulate in Hong Kong.

The costs in tögrög for destinations in China from Ulaanbaatar are found in the following table.

Destination	2nd class (hard sleeper)	1st class (soft sleeper)	Deluxe* (coupé)
Beijing	66,350	101,800	113,700
Datong	55,150	76,450	88,250
Ereen	37,100	50,900	63,310
Hohhot	47,710	64,140	77,000

* Prices are for Chinese trains. Mongolian trains are about 15% to 20% cheaper for deluxe (coupé) class.

Local Trains

If you're on a tight budget it's possible to take local trains between UB and Beijing. This will save some money but involves more hassle and uncertainty and requires more time. During the summer season, from mid-June to mid-August, international train bookings are almost impossible to get, unless you have booked your seats weeks or months in advance. The local train may be your only option.

The first option is train 22 or 21, which runs between Ulaanbaatar and Ereen just inside China. This Mongolian train leaves Ulaanbaatar at 10.10pm on Thursday and Sunday and arrives in Ereen at about 10.25am the next morning, after completing immigration and customs formalities. In reverse, train 21 leaves Ereen on Tuesday and Friday evenings and arrives the next day. The schedules for this train change regularly.

The second option is to take local trains to Zamyn-Üüd in Mongolia (see p203) and then cross the border by minivan or jeep. From Ereen you can ply deeper into China by either train or bus.

TRANS-MONGOLIAN RAILWAY

Travelling from Russia or China to Mongolia directly on the Trans-Mongolian Railway line is arguably the most epic train journey you can make. The following gives general information on this travelling route.

The names of the rail lines can be a bit confusing. The Trans-Mongolian Railway goes from Beijing through Ulaanbaatar and onto a junction called Zaudinsky, near Ulan Ude in Russia, where it meets the Trans-Siberian line and continues on to Moscow. The Trans-Siberian Railway runs between Moscow and the eastern Siberian port of Nakhodka – this route does not go through either China or Mongolia. The Trans-Manchurian Railway crosses the Russia–China border at Zabaikalsk–Manzhouli, also completely bypassing Mongolia.

General Train Information

At the stations in Mongolia and Russia, there may be someone on the platform selling food; in the more entrepreneurial China, someone on the platform will have some delicious fruit and soft drinks for sale.

The restaurant cars on the Russian and Chinese trains have decent food and drinks on offer, for around US\$2 to US\$4. Staff on the Russian train to Moscow have a tendency to sell off all the food at stops in Siberia, so you may find food supplies have dwindled by the time you reach Novosibirsk.

Note that toilets are normally locked whenever you are in a station and for five minutes before and after. Showers are only available in the deluxe carriages. In 2nd and 1st class, there is a washroom and toilet at the end of each carriage – which always get progressively more filthy. It's a good idea to bring a large enamel mug (available in most Chinese railway stations) and use it as a scoop to pour water over yourself from the washbasin.

Generally you are allowed 35kg of luggage, but for foreigners this is rarely checked, except perhaps when departing Beijing. A lot of smuggling is done on this train, so never agree to carry anything across the border for anyone else.

The trains are reasonably safe but it's still a good idea to watch your bags closely. For added safety, lock your cabins from the inside and also make use of the security clip on the upper left-hand part of the door. The clip can be flipped open from the outside with a knife, but not if you stuff the hole with paper.

If you want to get off or on the Trans-Mongolian at Sükhbaatar, Darkhan (travelling from Russia) or Sainshand (from China), you will still have to pay the full Ulaanbaatar fare. If you are not actually getting *on* the train in Ulaanbaatar, you should arrange for someone in the capital to let the attendant know that you will be boarding the train at a later stop. This is to ensure that your seat is not taken.

Tickets list the departure times. Get to the station at least 20 minutes before *arrival* to allow enough time to find the platform and struggle on board, as the train only stops in Ulaanbaatar for about 30 minutes.

For detailed information on the Trans-Mongolian and Trans-Siberian trains, try Lonely Planet's *Trans-Siberian Railway*.

What to Bring

US dollars in small denominations are useful to buy meals and drinks on the train, and to exchange for the local currency, so you can buy things at the train stations. It's a good idea to buy some Russian roubles or Chinese yuan at the licensed moneychangers in Ulaanbaatar before you leave Mongolia.

Stock up on munchies such as biscuits, chocolate and fruit, and bring some bottled water or juice. A small samovar at the end of each carriage provides constant boiling water, a godsend for making tea and coffee, as well as instant packet meals of noodles or soup.

Other essential items include thongs (flip flops) or slippers, an enamel mug, a flannel, toilet paper, plenty of reading material and loose, comfortable long pants. Tracksuits are a must for blending in with the locals.

Classes

With a few exceptions, all international trains have two or three classes. The names and standards of the classes depend on whether it is a Mongolian, Russian or Chinese train.

On the Russian (and Mongolian) trains, most travellers travel in 2nd class – printed on tickets and timetables as '1/4' and known as 'hard sleeper', 'coupe' or *kupeynny* in Russian. These are small, but perfectly comfortable, four-person compartments with four bunk-style beds and a fold-down table.

First class (printed as '2/4') is sometimes called a 'soft sleeper' or *myagkiy* in Russian. It has softer beds but hardly any more space than a Russian 2nd-class compartment and is not worth the considerably higher fare charged. On Chinese trains it is nonsmoking, which can be a godsend.

The real luxury (and expense) comes with Chinese deluxe class (printed as '1/2'): it involves roomy, wood-panelled two-berth compartments with a sofa, and a shower cubicle shared with the adjacent compartment. The deluxe class on Russian trains (slightly cheaper than the Chinese deluxe) has two bunks but is not much different in size from 2nd class and has no showers.

Customs & Immigration

There are major delays of three to six hours at both the China–Mongolia and Russia–Mongolia borders. Often trains cross the border during the middle of the night, when alert Mongolian and Russian officials maintain the upper hand. The whole process is not difficult or a hassle, just annoying because they keep interrupting your sleep.

Your passport will be taken for inspection and stamping. When it is returned, inspect it closely – sometimes they make errors such as cancelling your return visa for China. Foreigners generally sail through customs without having their bags opened, which is one reason people on the train may approach you and ask if you'll carry some of their luggage across the border – *this is not a good idea*.

During these stops, you can alight and wander around the station, which is just as well because the toilets on the train are locked during the inspection procedure.

Tickets

The international trains, especially the Trans-Mongolian Railway, are popular, so it's often hard to book this trip except during winter. Try to plan ahead and book as early as possible.

If you are in Ulaanbaatar and want to go to Irkutsk, Beijing or Moscow, avoid going on the Beijing–Moscow or Moscow–Beijing trains; use the other trains mentioned on p271 and p276, which *originate* in Ulaanbaatar. In Ulaanbaatar, you cannot buy tickets a few days in advance for the Beijing–Moscow or Moscow–Beijing trains, because staff in UB won't know how many people are already on the train. For these trains, you can only buy a ticket the day before departure, ie on Wednesday for trains from Ulaanbaatar to Moscow, and on Saturday for trains from Ulaanbaatar to Beijing. You will need to get to the ticket office early and get into the Mongolian scramble for tickets.

For details on buying tickets in Ulaanbaatar see p99.

Several agencies in Western countries can arrange tickets on the international trains, but their prices will be considerably higher than if you bought tickets from the point of departure. They often only make the effort if you also buy an organised tour from them.

Overseas branches of China International Travel Service (CITS) or China Travel Service (CTS) can often book train and plane tickets from Beijing to Ulaanbaatar. Also try the following places:

Gateway Travel (☎ 02-9745 3333; fax 02-9745 3237; www.russian-gateway.com.au) In Australia.

GW Travel Ltd (☎ 0161-928 9410; www.gwtravel.co.uk) In the UK.

Intourist (☎ 020-7538 8600; fax 020-7538 5967; www.intourist.com) In the UK.

Lernidee Reisen (☎ 030-786 0000; www.lernidee-reisen.de) German company.

Regent Holidays (☎ 0845-277 3317; www.regent-holidays.co.uk) In the UK.

The Russia Experience Ltd (☎ 020-8566 8846; www.trans-siberian.co.uk)

Sundowners (☎ 03-9672 5300; fax 03-9672 5311; www.sundowners.com.au) In Australia.

Trek Escapes (☎ 866-338 8735; www.trekescapes.com) In Canada.

White Nights International Tourism (☎ /fax 800-490-5008; 610 La Sierra Dr, Sacramento, CA 95864, USA)

From Beijing, the local train for Jining departs at 11.42am and takes about nine hours. A second train departs at 9.20pm and continues to Hohhot. The train from Jining to Érlìàn (Ereen) departs around noon and takes six hours. (Alternatively, a 7am bus takes just four hours.) If you have to stay the night in Jining, there's a budget hotel on the right (south) side of the plaza as you walk out of the train station. Most transport between Ereen and the border takes place in the morning.

Russia BORDER CROSSINGS

Most travellers go in and out of Russia at the Naushki–Sükhbaatar train border crossing. In addition, there are three road crossings: Tsagaannuur–Tashanta in Bayan-Ölgii aimag, Altanbulag–Kyakhta in Selenge and Ereentsav–Solovyevsk in Dornod. The crossings are open from 9am to noon and 2pm to 6pm daily except holidays.

There is hope that the Khankh–Mondy border in northern Khövsgöl will soon be opened; check the situation before heading out this way.

Both the road and rail crossings can be agonisingly slow, but at least on the road journey you can get out and stretch your legs. Train travellers have been stranded for up to 10 hours on the Russian side, spending much of this time locked inside the train cabins. Procedures on the Ulaanbaatar–Moscow train are faster than on the local trains.

We have received a number of complaints about scams and problems with customs on the Russian side of the border, so be ready for anything.

One thing to be careful about is the Russian exit declaration form. The currency you list on the form must match the currency you listed on the customs form you received when you entered the country. If the form shows that you are leaving with more dollars or euros than you had when you arrived, you will have to get off the train and change all the excess money into roubles. Further, if the entry form was not stamped when you arrived in Russia (or if you never received one) it will be considered invalid, so have the form stamped even if you have nothing to declare.

MONGOLIA OR BUST

In an age when getting from point A to point B has been simplified to the point of blandness, the Mongol Rally attempts to put a bit of spark back into the journey to Mongolia. According to rally rules, the London-to-Mongolia trip must be made in a vehicle that has an engine capacity of 1L or less. In other words, you have to travel 16,000km (10,000 miles) across some of the world's most hostile terrain in a piece of crap barely capable of a drive down to the corner shop.

The wacky idea of driving from London to Mongolia in a clapped-out banger was dreamt up by Englishman Thomas Morgan, whose own attempt to accomplish the feat failed miserably in 2003. Morgan had another go in 2004 and completed the trip, along with a few friends who were inspired by the utter lunacy of it all. Since then the Mongol Rally has become an annual rite of passage for English adventurers.

The journey begins by selecting a vehicle. Antique gutless wonders such as old Fiat Pandas and Ford Fiestas can be purchased for around 100 quid in England. Next, assemble your team – you can have as many people as you can squeeze into the damn thing. Then pay your dues: it's £387 to enter and then you must raise another £1000, which will go to a charity in Mongolia or another country en route (in 2007 the Mongol Rally raised over £200,000 in charity money). Finally, zoom out of London with 200 other likeminded drivers on 1 July.

The organisers give absolutely no advice on how to actually get to Mongolia; that you've got to figure out on your own. Teams have travelled as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far south as Afghanistan on their way across the Asian landmass. This is by no means a race – whether you arrive first or last, your only reward is a round of free beers at the finish line at Dave's Place (p91). Some teams make the trip in around five weeks, while others have taken as long as three months, stopping off at places en route.

The rally is organised by the grandly titled **League of Adventurists International** (<http://mongolrally.theadventurists.com>). If you want to sign up, contact the organisers early as there are only a limited number of spots available and these sell out a year in advance.

TRAINS TO/FROM MONGOLIA

Schedules change from one summer to another, and services reduce in winter, and can increase in summer. The durations below refer to the journey time to/from Ulaanbaatar.

Train	Train no	Day of departure	Departure time	Duration
China–Mongolia				
Beijing–Ulaanbaatar	23	Tue	7.40am*	30hr
Beijing–Ulaanbaatar–(Moscow)	3	Thu	1.50am	30hr
Hohhot–Ulaanbaatar	215	Sun, Wed	10.40pm	30hr
Mongolia–China				
Ulaanbaatar–Beijing	24	Thu	8.05am	30hr
(Moscow)–Ulaanbaatar–Beijing	4	Thu	8.05am	30hr
Ulaanbaatar–Hohhot	34	Mon, Fri	8.10pm	24hr
Mongolia–Russia				
Ulaanbaatar–Irkutsk	263	daily	7.35pm	36hr
Ulaanbaatar–Moscow	5	Tue, Fri	1.50pm	70hr
(Beijing)–Ulaanbaatar–Moscow	3	Thu	1.15pm	100hr
Russia–Mongolia				
Irkutsk–Ulaanbaatar	264	daily	7.10pm	36hr
Moscow–Ulaanbaatar	6	Wed, Thu	9pm	70hr
Moscow–Ulaanbaatar–(Beijing)	4	Sun	7.55pm	100hr

*Train 23 passes through Datong at approximately 2.15pm, Jining at 4.15pm, Ereen at 8.45pm and Zamyn-Üüd at 11.45pm.

To avoid these problems, either don't cross the border with foreign currency (roubles are OK) or be vigilant with that exit declaration form. Lying about not having foreign cash is one option, but you run the risk of being searched. Telling the border guard you plan to use a credit card may work.

Russian & Mongolian Border Towns

Customs and immigration between Naushki and Sükhbaatar can take at least four hours. You can have a look around Naushki, but there is little to see and the border crossing usually takes place in the middle of the night. Surprisingly, you may have difficulty finding anyone at the Naushki station to change money, so wait until Sükhbaatar or Ulaanbaatar, or somewhere else in Russia. (Get rid of your tögrög before you leave Mongolia, as almost no-one will want to touch them once you are inside Russia.)

The train may stop for one or two hours at, or near, the pleasant Mongolian border town of Sükhbaatar, but there is no need to look around. You may be able to buy some Russian roubles or Mongolian tögrög from a moneychanger at the train station, but the rate will be poor. If there aren't any moneychang-

ers, you can use US dollars cash to get by until you change money elsewhere.

BUS

Bus is probably the fastest form of public transport between Mongolia and Russia. A daily bus operated by **Vostok Trans** (☎ 9666 5531) departs Ulaanbaatar bound for Ulan Ude. It departs at 7.30pm, and the journey takes 10 hours and costs T33,600. Buses leave from outside the Discovery Mongolia Information Centre (p67). An Ulan Ude bus departs at the same time for Ulaanbaatar, leaving from the Hotel Baikal in Ulan Ude. In Ulan Ude contact **Trio-Impex** (☎ 3012-217 277; trio-tour@mail.ru) or **Buryat-Intour** (☎ 3012-210 056; bintur@yandex.ru).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

It's possible to drive between Russia and Mongolia at Tsagaannuur (Bayan-Ölgii), Altanbulag (Selenge) and Ereentsav (Dornod). However, these road crossings can be difficult and time consuming – up to six hours if traffic is backed up or if you have visa problems.

In order to speed things up, it may help to have a letter written by the Mongolian consular (or Russian consular if you are headed

that way) when you get your visa. The letter should state that you are authorised to take a car or motorcycle across the border. A carnet (passport for your car) may be useful but is not necessary. US citizens may want to bring documentation stating that visas are not needed as proof to inexperienced border guards.

Foreigners are currently not allowed to 'walk' across the Kyakhta–Altanbulag border, but they are allowed to pass through in a car or even on a motorcycle, so you may have to pay someone to drive you across. Things continue to change so it's worth asking if you can walk across the border.

TRAIN

Besides the Trans-Mongolian Railway connecting Moscow and Beijing, there is a direct train twice a week connecting Ulaanbaatar and Moscow, which is easier to book from Ulaanbaatar. The epic trip takes four days.

If you are headed to Lake Baikal, there is a daily train between Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk, which stops en route in Darkhan. These trains stop at every village, however, and train 263 travels past Lake Baikal at night, so if you are in a hurry or want to see the lake, take the Ulaanbaatar–Moscow (train 5) as far as Irkutsk. Note that departure and arrival times at Irkutsk are given in Moscow time, although Irkutsk is actually five hours ahead of Moscow.

This trip can be done more cheaply by travelling in stages on local trains (eg from Ulan Ude to Naushki, Naushki to Sükhbaatar, and Sükhbaatar to Ulaanbaatar), but this would

involve more hassles, especially as Russian visas are more difficult to arrange than Chinese due to Russian officials wanting full details of your itinerary.

In Moscow you can buy tickets at the building on Ulitsa Krasnoprudnaya 1, next door to the Yaroslavl train station, from where the trains to Ulaanbaatar and Beijing leave.

Infinity Travel (☎ 095-234 6555; fax 095-234 6556; www.infinity.ru) in Moscow is affiliated with the Traveller's Guesthouse and is one of the better private sellers.

A reliable agency in Ulan Ude is **Buryat-Intour** (☎ 3012-210 056; bintur@yandex.ru; 12 Ranzhurov Sta, Ulan Ude 670000).

In Irkutsk, you can try **Irkutsk-Baikalsk Intourist** (☎ 3952-290 161; Hotel Intourist, 14 Bulvar Gagarina 44, Irkutsk 664025) or **Irkutsk Baikalsk Travel Inc** (☎ 3952-200 134; fax 3952-200 070; www.irkutsk-baikalsk.com; 1a Cheremhovskiy Lane, Irkutsk 664025).

Approximate costs (in tögrög) for major destinations in Russia from Ulaanbaatar are listed below. Exact costs depend on whether the train is Russian, Chinese or Mongolian; we have listed the most expensive.

Destination	2nd class (hard sleeper)	1st class (soft sleeper)	Deluxe (coupé)
Irkutsk	33,100	53,720	60,430
Krasnoyarsk	60,540	74,220	99,220
Moscow	101,420	139,510	160,880
Naushki	21,450	24,970	35,750
Novosibirsk	69,210	84,860	113,280
Omsk	77,020	94,370	126,220
Perm	94,220	114,400	152,130
Ulan Ude	28,630	43,060	n/a
Yekaterinburg	91,020	110,350	148,080

GETTING AROUND

Travelling around the countryside independently is the best way to see Mongolia and meet the people, but there are several matters you need to be aware of. Annual outbreaks of forest fires, the plague, foot-and-mouth and even cholera may affect your travel plans if there are quarantine restrictions.

Generally, shortages of petrol and spare parts are now uncommon, except in remote regions. Accidents are not uncommon. Try to avoid travelling at night, when unseen potholes, drunk drivers and wildlife can

wreak havoc. Driving in the dark is also a great way to get completely lost.

AIR

Mongolia, a vast, sparsely populated country with very little infrastructure, relies heavily on air transport. It has 44 functioning airports, although only 12 of those have paved airstrips.

Almost all of the destinations are served directly from Ulaanbaatar, so flying from, say, Dalanzadgad to Bayan-Ölgii is impossible without first returning to UB. A T2000 domestic departure tax is payable at the airport.

Airlines in Mongolia

MIAT (☎ 011-322 118; http://miat.com) is the state-owned airline that once flew to every corner of the country. A lack of functioning aeroplanes and increased competition has limited its service to only a handful of cities, namely Mörön, Arvaikheer, Altai, Khovd and Dalanzadgad.

MIAT is not known for its safety record, although it hasn't had a fatal crash since 1998. Its domestic planes may be old but the pilots are the most experienced in the business. MIAT's international service, on the other hand, has seen dramatic improvements in recent years. Its fleet includes an Airbus 310 and a Boeing 737.

Aero Mongolia (☎ 011-283 029; www.aeromongolia.mn) began service in 2003 and now operates two Fokker aircraft. Routes change but in 2007 it flew domestic services to Ölgii, Donoi (Uliastai), Dalanzadgad, Mörön, Ulaangom, Choibalsan and Khovd. It is really stingy on baggage allowance, allowing only 15kg (including hand luggage); any kilogram over the limit costs T2500. It only accepts cash payments and the rate will be better if you pay in US dollars. Aero Mongolia also serves Hohhot and Tianjin in China, and Irkutsk in Russia.

EZ Nis (☎ 011-313 689; www.eznis.com) operates two Swedish-built Saab 340B propeller aeroplanes and has domestic flights to/from UB and Choibalsan, Baruun-Urt, Mörön, Ulaangom, Khovd, Bayankhongor and Dalanzadgad. More destinations are planned, so check the schedule. It's a slick and reliable operation, but more expensive than Aero Mongolia and MIAT.

Blue Sky Aviation (☎ 011-312 085; fax 011-322 857; www.bsamongolia.com) has a nine-seat Cessna that can be chartered for any part of the country.

Checking In

Get to the airport at least one hour before your flight. Even if you have a ticket, flight number and an allocated seat number, don't assume the plane won't be overbooked. There are usually no assigned seats so you'll have to do some scrambling once on board. Try to make certain your luggage has gone on the plane. If possible, carry your pack on as hand luggage to save time and the worry of losing your bag. However, make sure you don't have any sharp or blunt objects in your carry-on (including bike tools). Gas canisters are not allowed on any flight.

Costs

The foreigner price is often several times more than what Mongolians pay for tickets. Anyone can buy a ticket on your behalf, but you will always have to pay in US dollars (or by credit card in Ulaanbaatar). Tickets range from US\$66 (to Arvaikheer) to US\$183 for a four-hour, 1380km flight to the far west – pretty reasonable, considering the distances. Children aged between five and 16 years pay half; under fives fly free. If you've come on a student visa you can get 25% to 50% off the cost of the ticket.

Ask about baggage allowances when you buy your aeroplane ticket. EZ Nis allows you to carry 20kg without extra charges.

Reservations & Tickets

A domestic ticket reservation isn't worth diddly-squat until you have a ticket in your hand. In the countryside, buy your ticket as soon as you arrive.

You can buy a return ticket in Ulaanbaatar, but there is no computerised reservation system connecting the various airports around the country so you will have to reconfirm your reservation at the airport as soon as you arrive at your destination.

If you wish to fly in one direction and return by road in the other (for example to Mörön), it's best to fly from Ulaanbaatar, where you are more likely to get a ticket and a seat, and then return overland – otherwise you may wait days or more for a flight and ticket in Mörön.

Seats can be difficult to get in summer, especially in the July tourist peak and in late August as students return to college.

BOGIES

Don't be concerned if you get off at Ereen (on the Chinese side of the border) and the train disappears from the platform. About two hours are spent changing the bogies (wheel assemblies) because the Russians (and, therefore, the Mongolians) and the Chinese use different railway gauges. Train buffs may want to see the bogie-changing operation. Stay on the train after it disgorges passengers in Ereen. The train then pulls into a large shed about 1km from the station. Get off immediately before the staff lock the doors – they really don't want you in the train anyway. It's OK to walk around the shed and take photos, but don't get in anybody's way.

BICYCLE

For keen bikers with a sense of adventure, Mongolia offers an unparalleled cycling experience. The vast, open steppes make for rough travel but if properly equipped there is nothing stopping you from travelling pretty much anywhere (although a trip to the Gobi could only be done with vehicle support). For details on cycle touring, see p55.

BOAT

Although there are 397km of navigable waterways in Mongolia, rivers aren't used for transporting people or cargo. The biggest boat in the country is the *Sükhbaatar*, which very occasionally travels around Khövsgöl Nuur. There's also a customs boat that patrols the Selenge Gol on the border of Russia and Mongolia. Some ger camps at Khövsgöl Nuur also own small boats that can be chartered.

BUS

Private bus companies serve a handful of Mongolian cities, all connected to Ulaanbaatar. These include Baruun-Urt, Öndörkhaan, Dalanzadgad, Tsetserleg, Arvaikheer, Erdenet, Darkhan and Mörön. Most buses are old rust buckets, except the services to Darkhan and Erdenet, which use modern buses. The benefit of using buses is that they leave on time and drive straight to their destination, as opposed to private vans, which run on Mongolian time.

CAMEL & YAK

Intractable yaks and confrontational camels are recognised forms of transport in Mongolia. Camels, which can carry around 250kg, carry about one-third of all cargo around the Gobi Desert. Yaks are also a useful and environmentally friendly way of hauling heavy cargo.

At Ongiin Khiid and Khongoryn Els you can arrange a multiple-day camel trek. A few travel agencies include a ride on a camel or yak in their programme. Otherwise, you can always ask at a ger.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Travelling around Mongolia with your own car or motorcycle – without a driver – is not recommended. What look like main roads on the map are often little more than tyre tracks in the dirt, sand or mud, and there is hardly a signpost in the whole country. In Mongolia, roads connect nomads, most of whom by their

nature keep moving, so even the roads are seminomadic, shifting like restless rivers. Remote tracks quickly turn into eight-lane dirt highways devoid of any traffic, making navigation tricky – some drivers follow the telephone lines when there are any, or else ask for directions at gers along the way. Towns with food and water are few and far between, and very few people in the countryside will speak anything but Mongolian or, if you are lucky, Russian.

To help you find your way around, use the GPS Coordinates Table (p284), which contains many towns and villages, and some sights. The coordinates for a number of other sights are included in the regional chapters.

There are a couple of car-rental agencies in Ulaanbaatar, but they require that you be driven by one of their drivers. **Drive Mongolia** (☎ 011-312 277, 9911 8257; www.drivemongolia.com) is a tour operator that allows you to drive a hire vehicle, but you need to go with their support vehicle or be accompanied by a Mongolian driver. Their jeeps cost around US\$50 per day.

If you want to buy a vehicle, you will have to ask around, or check out the *tsaiz zakh* (car market) in the northeastern part of Ulaanbaatar. A new Ij Planeta – the Russian-made motorcycle you see all over the countryside – sells for around US\$900. A new Russian jeep costs around US\$5000. In markets the sign '*zarna*' (Зарна) on a jeep means 'for sale'.

Travellers can use an international driving licence to drive any vehicle in Mongolia; expat residents need to apply for a local licence. If you buy a vehicle, inquire about registration at the local police station.

Two types of Russian fuel are available: '93' is the best and the type used by Japanese jeeps, but it's only generally available in Ulaanbaatar; all Russian-made vehicles use '76', which is all that is available in the countryside. Petrol stations are marked by the initials 'ИИТС', which is Mongolian for station.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world and we don't normally recommend it. People who choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Mongolia is different, however. Because the country is so vast, public transport so limited

and the people so poor, hitching (usually on trucks) is a recognised – and, often, the only – form of transport in the countryside. Hitching is seldom free and often no different from just waiting for public transport to turn up. It is *always* slow – after stopping at gers to drink, fixing flat tyres, breaking down, running out of petrol and getting stuck in mud and rivers, a truck can take 48 hours to cover 200km.

Hitching is not generally dangerous personally, but it is still hazardous and often extremely uncomfortable. Don't expect much traffic in remote rural areas; you might see one or two vehicles a day on many roads, and sometimes nobody at all for several days. In the towns, ask at the market, where trucks invariably hang around, or at the bus/truck/jeep station. The best place to wait is the petrol station on the outskirts of town, where most vehicles stop before any journey.

If you rely on hitching entirely, though, you will just travel from one dreary aimag town to another. You still need to hire a jeep to see, for example, the Gobi Desert, the mountains in Khentii or some of the lakes in the far west.

Truck drivers will normally expect some negotiable payment, which won't be much cheaper than a long-distance bus or shared jeep; figure on around T1500 per hour travelled.

Bring a water- and dust-proof bag to put your backpack in. The most important things to bring, though, are an extremely large amount of patience and time, and a high threshold for discomfort. Carry camping gear for the inevitable breakdowns, or suffer along with your travel mates.

HORSE

Horses have provided reliable transport for Mongolians for the past few thousand years. If it worked for the Mongol hordes, it can work for you. In recent decades though, many herders have acquired motorcycles, but most still use horses as their primary mode of transport. Mongolians rarely walk anywhere.

It's impossible to see everything by horse unless you have a lot of time, but it is the best way to travel around some areas (see p59 for some ideas). Most importantly, riding a horse helps you meet locals on a level footing and experience the country as Mongolians have done for centuries.

If you are a serious rider, there are horses everywhere; with some luck, guidance and

experience, you should be able to find a horse suited to your needs. Mongolians swap horses readily, so there's no need to be stuck with a horse you don't like, or which doesn't like you. The only exception is in April and May, when all animals are weak after the long winter and before fresh spring plants have made their way through the melting snows. The best time for riding is in the summer (June to September).

You can rent a horse and guide in most tourist areas for between US\$6 and US\$20 per day (the latter at ger camps). Most foreign (see p270) and local travel agencies also organise horse-riding trips.

One thing to bear in mind is that when mounting a horse (or camel), do so only from the left. The animals have been trained to accept human approach from the left, and may rear if approached the wrong way. The Mongolians use the phrase '*chu*' to make their horses go. Somewhat telling about the obstinate nature of Mongolian horses is that there is no word for 'stop'. If you are considering a multiday horse trip, remember that horses attract all kinds of flies. Also, if you're not used to riding a horse, you're likely to get mighty stiff and sore.

A few foreigners cherish the idea of buying a horse and taking off around Mongolia. It's a fine adventure (if you can get a visa for long enough), but there are several pitfalls to be aware of. For some handy advice see the boxed text, p281.

Some final advice: watch and learn. Mongolians almost invented horsemanship. Also be prepared for at least one spill.

LOCAL TRANSPORT Bus, Minibus & Trolley-bus

In Ulaanbaatar, regular and very crowded trolley-buses, buses and minibuses ply the main roads for around T200 a ride. Cities such as Darkhan and Erdenet have minibuses that shuttle from one end of town to the other, but you are unlikely to need them because most facilities are located centrally.

Taxi

Only in UB and a couple of the bigger cities is there taxi service, though in UB any vehicle on the street is a potential taxi – just flag down the driver and agree on a price. The rate at the time of writing was T300 per kilometre, but this will certainly increase.

MINIVAN & JEEP

Both minivans and jeeps are used for long- and short-distance travel in the countryside. They can be shared among strangers, which is good for a group of people headed from one aimag centre to another (or usually to/from Ulaanbaatar). Alternatively, they can be hired privately. In most cases, the grey, 11-seat Furgon minivans are used for longer cross-country trips that see a lot of traffic. Jeeps, khaki-coloured or green, are found in more remote areas such as *sum* (district) centres. They are nicknamed *jaran yös* (shortened to *jaris*), which means '69' – the number of the original model. The large and comfortable Toyota Landcruiser-style jeeps are owned by wealthy Mongolians and never used for share purposes (though some travel agencies might have them for hire, but expect to pay at least 30% more than for a good Russian jeep).

On the terrible Mongolian roads, these jeeps and minivans are an important form of transport, and are mandatory when visiting more remote attractions. They can typically only travel between 30km/h and 50km/h. The Gobi region generally has the best roads and here you can average 60km/h.

Share Minivan & Jeep

Share jeeps and minivans are the most common form of public transport in Mongolia. Private vehicles go from Ulaanbaatar to all aimag capitals, major cities and tourist destinations. Less frequent and reliable services operate between most aimag capitals, but very few minivans go to the *sums*.

If you rely solely on share vehicles to get around, you'll see surprisingly little of

Mongolia. Most vehicles drive between uninteresting cities with little to see on the way. You'll still need to hire a car from the aimag or *sum* centres to see anything, and it's usually easier to organise this from Ulaanbaatar.

For a long-distance trip bring snacks and water; stops at a roadside *guanx* (canteen or cheap restaurant) can be few and far between. You can expect at least one breakdown and it would be a good idea to bring a sleeping bag and warm clothes just in case you have to spend the night somewhere. Long-distance travel of over 10 hours is fiendishly uncomfortable. Most people who take a long-distance minivan to Mörön or Dalanzadgad end up flying back.

Minivan fares are reasonable, costing the equivalent of US\$12 to get to Dalanzadgad (21 hours) from Ulaanbaatar or US\$15 to Mörön (25 hours).

In the countryside, the post office operates postal vans, which accept passengers. They have fixed departure times, normally running once a week between an aimag capital and a *sum* capital. The local post office should have a list of departure times and fares.

Hiring a Minivan or Jeep

The best way to see the countryside of Mongolia independently is to hire your own minivan or jeep, which will come with a driver and, for a little extra, a guide. If you share the costs with others it doesn't work out to be too expensive. With enough time, camping equipment, water and food, and a reliable jeep and driver, you'll have the time of your life.

You can save money by using public transport to major regional gateways – that

THE MINIVAN WAITING GAME

A real problem with share vehicles is that they are privately operated and won't leave until they are packed tighter than a sardine tin. The waiting game sometimes has the effect of turning your hair grey.

In the countryside, most vans just park at the local market and wait for passengers to turn up, which means that if the van isn't already mostly full you'll be waiting around all day for the seats to fill up, if they ever do.

The process can be agonising. Even after the 11-seat van has 20 or so passengers, the driver will vanish for an hour or two for lunch, or to find more cargo, spare parts and petrol.

One solution is to ask the driver to pick you up at your hotel or the local internet café when they are ready to go, which they usually agree to. This arrangement works out well and allows you to do something productive (such as sleep or catch up on your emailing) while the other passengers sweat it out at the market. The waiting time from Ulaanbaatar isn't as bad, but you could still count on two hours or more.

BLAZING SADDLES *Joshua Handler*

If horses are of interest, Mongolia is the place to mount up. Riding from the time they can sit up straight, Mongolians have built their culture around the horse. They use it for work, transportation and nutrition. No, Mongolians don't eat horses; instead, they drink fermented mare milk during the summer months.

Creating a horseback adventure is certainly doable; it just takes patient perseverance. (Actually, these two words go well together regardless of your activity in Mongolia.)

Gear and horses are the two most important subjects to focus on. A saddle, bridle, halter and hobble can all be bought at the outdoor market in Ulaanbaatar. An English hybrid saddle can be bought for T55,000 to T65,000, packsaddles for half that.

Unless you have thighs of steel and have previously ridden in a Mongolian saddle, it is best to admire their beauty from afar. If you are long-legged, bring narrow stirrup leathers from home. To round out your appearance, buy a *del* (overcoat) or have one made for you. Most country folk wear them and they are great protection against wind, rain and snow, as well as for use as a blanket or ground cloth.

Once outfitted, locate a horse or two. You may buy or rent. Despite their vast numbers, horse prices are on the increase. A good horse may cost T300,000 and up. Herdsmen are loath to part with their well-mannered, quiet horses and may try to sell an oldie without much go. Make sure the horse walks at a comfortable pace, and load up a packhorse before buying. Also with packhorses, extra quiet is good.

Renting is a perfectly viable option if you are making a loop, because you will never recoup your investment when you sell back your horses. A fair price is T5000 to T10,000 per day; if you hire a guide, double that amount.

On Mongolia's steppe an open-door policy exists for locals and foreigners alike. If you are in desperate need of food and drink, or would simply like to say hello, you may approach a ger. Remember to call out prior to dismounting so the ferocious animal barking at you will be restrained. Break the language barrier with pictures of your family and hometown, and it is recommended that you offer the family a small gift, such as sweets or horse/car/motorcycle magazines.

It is not necessary to carry all your foodstuffs from the beginning if you will be passing towns along your journey. Topographic maps are best bought in UB; double-check that marked towns have a store, as some may no longer exist in this nomadic culture.

Rivers are a great source of water, however, the smaller ones are seasonal. Wells will be your other option, though these can also be dry. Ask around. Where there are animals and people, there is water.

Unless you speak Mongolian or Russian, communication will be difficult in the countryside. Lonely Planet's *Mongolian Phrasebook* will be invaluable. A majority of Mongolians are literate and will be able to read the words you are stumbling over.

When the trip ends and you say farewell to your horses, do as the Mongolians do and pluck some hairs from the mane and tail. Tie them around something to remind you of the freedom you felt in the Land of the Great Blue Sky.

For more information about travelling on horseback in Mongolia, see Joshua Handler's website: www.stepintoyourselfexpeditions.com.

is Mörön for Khövsgöl Nuur, Khovd for the west, Dalanzadgad for the south Gobi and Choibalsan for the far east. Then, from these places, you will be able to rent a jeep fairly easily, though drivers outside Ulaanbaatar will have little experience of dealing with tourists. You may not find a local English-speaking guide, so bring one from Ulaanbaatar.

Don't expect to rent a jeep outside of an aimag capital. Villages do have jeeps, but they may not be available or running.

Note that when hiring a vehicle in the countryside to take you to another rural city you will have to pay for the return fare because the driver will have to go back with an empty van. This does not apply when travelling to

Ulaanbaatar as the driver can find passengers there. The upshot of this is that it will cost almost the same to hire a driver to take you from, for example, Ulaangom to Mörön as it would from Ulaangom to Ulaanbaatar.

In Ulaanbaatar, the best place to start looking for a driver and a guide is at the various guesthouses. These guesthouses will take a commission, but you'll get a driver and/or guide who understands the needs of a tourist. More importantly they know the tourist routes and can locate hard-to-find attractions such as caves, deer stones and ruined monasteries. Finding a driver from the jeep stand or market, and negotiating on your own, will be cheaper, but they will probably be in a hurry to get back home, which won't work well if you want to take it slow and see the sights.

On a long-distance trip, tour operators will have a per-day charge (usually US\$50 to US\$60) that will probably include petrol. This may be more if they throw in camping and cooking gear.

Vehicles that you hire on your own (from a market) usually charge US\$35 per day without petrol. Russian jeeps have terrible fuel economy: you'll need 20L to travel around 100km. Petrol was around T900 per litre at the time of research. Some drivers may want to charge a per-kilometre rate; in the countryside this is around T450. Vehicle hire is more expensive the further you get from Ulaanbaatar.

It is vital that you and the driver agree to the terms and conditions – and the odometer reading – before you start. Ask about all possible 'extras' such as waiting time, food and accommodation. There are several private bridges and tolls around the countryside (each costing about T500), which are normally paid for by you. If you arrange for a jeep to pick you up, or drop you off, agree on a reduced price for the empty vehicle travelling one way.

Three can sit in the back seat of a Russian jeep, but it may be uncomfortable on longer trips. Five or six people can ride in a minivan. If you also take a guide, rather than just a driver, you can therefore take a maximum of three passengers in a jeep, though two would be more comfortable. There is usually ample room at the back of the jeep and minivan for backpacks, tents, water and so on.

TRIP PREPARATION

There are several other factors you should consider when embarking on a jeep or minivan tour of Mongolia. Before the trip, explain your itinerary in detail to the driver and make sure they have a map and agree to the route. For long expeditions, also ensure your driver has jerry cans, for extra petrol, and a water drum. A wide-mouthed plastic drum is also very useful for storing food, as boxes will rapidly disintegrate. Resealable bags are useful for opened bags of sugar, pasta and so on. Your backpacks will get filthy so it's a good idea to put them in a water- and dust-proof bag.

Drivers from tourist agencies will assume that you will feed them along the way. On a longer trip it's easiest for everyone to cook, eat and wash up together. If you don't want to do this, you will have to agree on a fee for the driver's food or buy them the food yourself. This shouldn't cost more than T4000 per day.

Experienced drivers will have their own Soviet-built petrol stove, though it's a good idea to bring your own stove as a backup, and to boil water for tea while the other stove is cooking dinner. If you are cooking for a group you'll need a big cooking pot and a ladle. Everyone should bring their own penknife, cutlery, bowl and torch. Avoid drinking from the same water bottles as this spreads viruses around the group.

OTAM VANS

Mongolia's unreliable, slow and uncomfortable public transport system has led to the birth of **Open Tour Around Mongolia** (OTAM; Map p64; ☎ 7015 0159; www.otamecotours.com; Room 504, 5th fl, Alyska Bldg, Peace Ave), a private travel company that dispatches vans from Ulaanbaatar to make a loop tour of the countryside. With an OTAM ticket you can hop off wherever you like and get back on when the next OTAM van appears (usually two days later). The company has two separate routes that service the Gobi and northern Mongolia; each costs US\$123. It also runs a western Mongolia tour (US\$280) and a tour to sights near Ulaanbaatar, including Khustain National Park, Mandshir Khiid and Terelj (US\$40).

TAKING A GPS

When you are travelling around the featureless plains of eastern Mongolia, the deserts of the Gobi or a tangle of confusing valleys in the west, a Global Positioning System (GPS) can be very useful in determining where exactly you are, as long as you have a reliable map on which to pinpoint your coordinates. We have given GPS coordinates for many hard-to-find places in this book, plus coordinates for *sum* (district) and aimag centres (to an accuracy of up to 1km from the town centre). Many places are listed in the table on p284.

A GPS won't help you every time, as you'll still need to know which road to take, even if you know the rough direction. Gobi and steppe areas are particularly tricky – except for the main routes there probably won't be any one road between places. Every few kilometres the track you're on will veer off in the wrong direction, requiring constant corrections and zigzagging.

It is always a good idea to ask about road conditions at gers along the way. Often a good-looking road will become impassable, running into a river, swamp or wall of mountains; herders can offer good info on the best route to take. If all else fails, you can always rely on Mongolian GPS (Ger Positioning System), which requires following the vague sweep of the ger owner's hand over the horizon, until you reach the next ger.

Shop as a group when you reach a city or town. If you are travelling with strangers, it's a good idea to keep everyone happy by rotating seats so that everyone (including the guide) has a go in the front seat. Don't push the driver or guide too hard; allow them (and the vehicle) to stop and rest. However, regular and lengthy stops for a chat and a smoke can add time to the journey.

Lastly, if you are on a long trip, you'll find morale boosted by a trip to a bathhouse (hot water!) in an aimag capital. Another morale booster is the occasional meal in a decent *ganz*. If you are camping a lot then add in at least one night in a decent hotel to clean up and sort out your stuff.

GUIDES

No-one in the countryside speaks anything other than Mongolian and Russian, so a guide-cum-translator is very handy, and almost mandatory. A guide will explain local traditions, help with any hassles with the police, find accommodation, negotiate jeeps, explain captions in museums and act as linguistic and cultural interpreter.

In Ulaanbaatar you can find guides through travel agencies, guesthouses or the bulletin board at Chez Bernard (p90). In the countryside, there is nothing to do but ask – try the hotels and schools. Guides are easier to find between 15 June and 1 August, when schools and universities are on summer break.

For getting around Ulaanbaatar, a non-professional guide or a student will cost a negotiable US\$8 to US\$15 per day. To take

one around the countryside from the capital you will have to include expenses for travel, food and accommodation. In an aimag capital, a guide (if you can find one) costs about US\$5 per day, plus any expenses. For a professional guide who is knowledgeable in a specific interest, such as bird-watching, and fluent in your language, the bidding starts at US\$20 per day.

HAZARDS

Flat tyres are a time-honoured tradition. Insist that your driver bring a spare and a tyre-patch kit consisting of rubber patches, glue, extra tyre valves and a valve tool. Be sure the driver has a tyre pump, hydraulic jack and tyre irons. If the driver doesn't have a useable spare tyre, request that they buy one before leaving the city.

The quickest distance between two points is a straight line, and the only thing that could (but not always) put off a Mongolian jeep driver from taking a shortcut is a huge mountain range or raging river. If renting a jeep by the kilometre, you will welcome a shortcut, especially to shorten an uncomfortable trip. If you have an experienced driver, allow them to take shortcuts when they feel it is worthwhile, but don't insist on any – they are the expert. The downside of shortcuts is the possibility of breaking down on more isolated roads.

Serious mechanical breakdowns are a definite possibility. Should your vehicle break down irreparably in a rural area, you'll be faced with the task of trying to get back to civilisation either on foot (not recommended), by

or Erdenet. To the south, there are daily direct trains from Ulaanbaatar to Zamyn-Üüd, via Choir and Sainshand. There are also trains terminating at Choir twice a week. You can't use the Trans-Mongolian Railway for domestic transport.

When travelling in hard-seat class (see below), you will almost certainly have to fight to get a seat. If you're not travelling alone, one of you can scramble on board and find seats and the other can bring the luggage on board. Young boys and girls usually travel around the train selling bread and fizzy drinks. Otherwise, there is nothing to eat or drink on local trains.

Classes

There are usually three classes on domestic passenger trains: hard seat, hard sleeper and soft seat. In hard-seat class, the seats are actually padded bunks but there are no assigned bunks nor any limit to the amount of tickets sold, so the carriages are always crowded and dirty. A hard sleeper (*platzkartnuu*) looks just like the hard seat but everyone gets their own

bunk and there is the option of getting a set of sheets and a blanket (T900). Upgrades are available to soft seat if you decide you can't stand the hard seats.

Soft seats are only a little bit softer, but the conditions are much better: the price difference (usually at least double the price of the hard seat) is prohibitive for most Mongolians. The soft-seat carriages are divided into compartments with four beds in each. You are given an assigned bed, and will be able to sleep, assuming, of course, that your compartment mates aren't rip-roaring drunk and noisy. If you travel at night, clean sheets are provided for about T900, which is a wise investment since some of the quilts smell like mutton. Compared with hard-seat class, it's the lap of luxury, and worth paying extra.

If you're travelling from Ulaanbaatar, it is important to book a soft seat well in advance – this can be done up to 10 days before departure. There may be a small booking fee. In general, booking ahead is a good idea for any class, though there will always be hard-seat tickets available.

Health

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Mongolia's dry, cold climate and sparse human habitation means there are few of the infectious diseases that plague tropical countries in Asia. The rough-and-tumble landscape and lifestyle, however, presents challenges of its own. Injuries sustained from falling off a horse are common in the summer season. In winter, the biggest threats are the flu and pneumonia, which spread like wildfire in November.

The biggest risk to your health in Mongolia may be the hospitals. The number of doctors is chronically low and the standard of medical training is patchy at best, and often very poor. If you do become seriously ill in Mongolia, your local embassy can provide details of Western doctors. Emergencies require evacuation to Seoul or Beijing. If in the countryside, make a beeline for Ulaanbaatar to have your ailment diagnosed.

The following advice is a general guide only; be sure to seek the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while abroad. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before going on a long trip, carry a spare pair

of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

Western medicine can be in short supply in Mongolia. Most medicine comes from China and Russia and the labels won't be in English, so bring whatever you think you might need from home. Take extra supplies of prescribed medicine and divide it into separate pieces of luggage; that way if one piece goes astray, you'll still have a back-up supply.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. (Check the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services for more information.)

While you may prefer a policy that pays hospital bills on the spot, rather than paying first and sending in documents later, in Mongolia the only place that might accept this is the SOS Medica clinic (see p66).

Declare any existing medical conditions to the insurance company; if your problem is pre-existing the company will not cover you if it is not declared. You may require extra cover for adventurous activities – make sure you are covered for a fall if you plan on riding a horse or a motorbike. If you are uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive, with bills over US\$100,000 not uncommon.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. As most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock vaccines and will be able to give specific

recommendations for you and your trip. This is especially important for children and pregnant women. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination

MEDICAL KIT CHECK LIST

Following is a list of items you should consider including in your medical kit – consult your pharmacist for brands available in your country.

- Antibacterial cream (eg Muciprocin)
- Antibiotics (prescription only) – for travel well ‘off the beaten track’ carry the prescription with you in case you need it refilled
- Antifungal cream or powder (eg Clotrimazole) – for fungal skin infections and thrush
- Antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)
- Antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine) – for cuts and grazes
- Aspirin or paracetamol (acetaminophen in the USA) – for pain or fever
- Bandages, Band-Aids (plasters) and other wound dressings
- Calamine lotion, sting-relief spray or aloe vera – to ease irritation from sunburn and insect bites or stings
- Cold and flu tablets, throat lozenges and nasal decongestant
- Insect repellent (DEET-based)
- Loperamide or diphenoxylate – ‘blockers’ for diarrhoea
- Multivitamins – consider for long trips, when dietary vitamin intake may be inadequate
- Rehydration mixture (eg Gastrolyte) – to prevent dehydration, which may occur during bouts of diarrhoea (particularly important when travelling with children)
- Scissors, tweezers and a thermometer – note that mercury thermometers are prohibited by airlines
- Sunscreen, lip balm and eye drops
- Water purification tablets or iodine (iodine is not to be used by pregnant women or people with thyroid problems)

(otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all of the vaccinations you have received, and take it with you.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com is a good place to start. The WHO publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost at www.who.int/ith. Another website of general interest is MD Travel Health at www.mdtravelhealth.com, which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet’s *Healthy Travel Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller’s Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills (www.travellingwell.com.au). Lonely Planet’s *Travel with Children* is useful for families.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk regularly about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones) try to drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eat light

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The WHO recommends the following vaccinations for travel to Mongolia:

Adult Diphtheria & Tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years’ protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur with some people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers, it provides lifetime protection for 95% of people. Immunisation is given as three doses over six months, though a rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination for Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm.

Measles, Mumps & Rubella (MMR) Two doses of MMR are recommended unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults need a booster.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single dose. Tablets are also available, although the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. A sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven’t had chickenpox discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

The following are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Influenza A single jab lasts one year and is recommended for those over 65 years of age or with underlying medical conditions such as heart or lung disease.

Japanese B Encephalitis Involves a series of three injections with a booster after two years. Recommended if spending more than one month in rural areas in the summer months.

Pneumonia A single injection with a booster after five years is recommended for all travellers over 65 years of age or with underlying medical conditions that compromise immunity, such as heart or lung disease, cancer or HIV.

Rabies Three injections are required. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years’ protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis (TB) A complex issue. High-risk adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than a vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime. Children under five spending more than three months in China and/or Mongolia should be vaccinated.

meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. A herbal alternative is ginger.

IN MONGOLIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Health care is readily available in Ulaanbaatar, but choose your hospital and doctor carefully. Ordinary Mongolians won’t know the best place to go, but a reputable travel agency or top-end hotel might. The best advice will come from your embassy. Consultations cost around US\$5, although SOS Medica, a reliable clinic in Ulaanbaatar with Western doctors, charges around \$200. Most basic drugs are available without a pre-

scription. See p66 for more details. Health services in the countryside are abysmal or nonexistent. Taking very small children to the countryside is therefore risky. Female travellers will need to take pads and tampons with them on a trip as these won’t be available outside the main cities.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Brucellosis

The UN Food & Agricultural Organization (FAO) reports that Mongolia is a high-risk area for brucellosis. This is a disease of cattle yaks, camels and sheep but it can also affect humans. The most likely way for humans to contract this disease is by drinking unboiled milk or eating home-made cheese. People with open cuts on their hands who handle freshly killed meat can also be infected.

In humans, brucellosis causes severe headaches, joint and muscle pains, fever and fatigue. There may be diarrhoea and, later, constipation. The onset of the symptoms

can occur from five days to several months after exposure, with the average time being two weeks.

Most patients recover in two or three weeks, but people can get chronic brucellosis, which recurs sporadically for months or years and can cause long-term health problems. Fatalities are rare but possible.

Brucellosis is a serious disease which requires blood tests to make the diagnosis. If you think you may have contracted the disease seek medical attention, preferably outside Mongolia.

Bubonic Plague

This disease (which wiped out one-third of Europe during the Middle Ages) makes an appearance in remote parts of Mongolia in late summer. Almost 90% of reported cases occur in August and September.

The disease (also known as the Black Plague) is normally carried by marmots, squirrels and rats and can be transmitted to humans by bites from fleas that make their home on the infected animals. It can also be passed from human to human by coughing. The symptoms are fever and enlarged lymph nodes. The untreated disease has a 60% death rate, but if you get to a doctor it can be quickly treated. The best drug is the antibiotic streptomycin, which must be injected intramuscularly, but it is not available in Mongolia. Tetracycline is another drug that may be used.

During an outbreak, travel to infected areas is prohibited, which can greatly affect overland travel. All trains, buses and cars travelling into Ulaanbaatar from infected areas are also thoroughly checked when an outbreak of the plague has been reported, and vehicles are sprayed with disinfectant.

Hepatitis

This is a general term for inflammation of the liver. It is a common disease worldwide. The symptoms are similar in all forms of the illness, and include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, aches and pains and feelings of weakness, followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-coloured faeces, jaundiced (yellow) skin and yellowing of the whites of the eyes. People who have hepatitis should avoid alcohol for some time after the illness, as the liver needs time to recover.

Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food and drinking water. You should seek medical advice, but there is not much you can do apart from resting, drinking lots of fluids, eating lightly and avoiding fatty foods. Hepatitis E is transmitted in the same way as hepatitis A; it can be particularly serious in pregnant women.

Hepatitis B is endemic in Mongolia. It is spread through contact with infected blood, blood products or body fluids. The symptoms of hepatitis B may be more severe than type A and the disease can lead to long-term problems such as chronic liver damage, liver cancer or long-term carrier state. Hepatitis C and D are spread in the same way as hepatitis B and can also lead to long-term complications.

There are vaccines against hepatitis A and B, but there are currently no vaccines against the other types of hepatitis.

Rabies

In the Mongolian countryside, family dogs are often vicious and can be rabid; it is their saliva that is infectious. Any bite, scratch or even a lick from an animal should be cleaned immediately and thoroughly. Scrub with soap and running water, and then apply alcohol or iodine solution. Medical help should be sought promptly to receive a course of injections to prevent the onset of the symptoms and death. The incubation period for rabies depends on where you're bitten. On the head, face or neck it's as little as 10 days, whereas on the legs it's 60 days.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

The most common STDs in Mongolia include herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not syphilis or herpes. If after any sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check upon your return.

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is a bacterial infection usually transmitted from person to person by coughing but which may be transmitted through consumption of unpasteurised milk. Milk that has been boiled is safe to drink, and the souring of milk to

DRINKING WATER

- Bottled water is generally safe – check that the seal is intact at purchase.
- Tap water in Ulaanbaatar and other cities probably won't make you sick but because of antiquated plumbing the water may contain traces of metals which won't be good for your long-term health.
- Be cautious about drinking from streams and lakes as they are easily polluted by livestock. Water is usually OK if you can get it high up in the mountains, near the source. If in doubt, boil your water.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size (eg less than four microns).

make yogurt or cheese also kills the bacilli. Travellers are usually not at great risk as close household contact with an infected person is usually required before the disease is passed on. You may need to have a TB test before you travel as this can help diagnose the disease later if you become ill.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets), and steer clear of ice. Only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled, and be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Eat food that is hot through and avoid buffet-style meals.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention.

Giardiasis is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardiasis, but may not be specific to giardiasis. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated, but this can take months. The treatment of choice is tinidazole; metronidazole is a second option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Altitude Sickness

Except in rare cases, only mountaineers will experience altitude sickness in Mongolia. Mild symptoms include headache, lethargy, dizziness, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery – usually a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, immediate descent is necessary; even 500m can help.

Heatstroke

This serious, occasionally fatal, condition can occur if the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down and the body temperature rises to dangerous levels. Long, continuous exposure to high temperatures and insufficient fluids can leave you vulnerable to heatstroke.

The symptoms are feeling unwell, not sweating very much (or at all) and a high body temperature. Where sweating has ceased, the skin becomes flushed and red. Victims can become confused, aggressive or delirious. Get victims out of the sun, remove their clothing and cover them with a wet sheet or towel and fan continually. Give fluids if they are conscious.

Hypothermia

In a country where temperatures can plummet to -40°C, cold is something you should take seriously. If you are trekking at high altitudes or simply taking a long bus trip across the country, particularly at night, be especially prepared. Even in the lowlands,

sudden winds from the north can send the temperature plummeting.

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it and the core temperature of the body falls. It is best to dress in layers; silk, wool and some of the new artificial fibres are all good insulating materials. A hat is important, as a lot of heat is lost through the head. A strong, waterproof outer layer is essential (and a 'space' blanket for emergencies if trekking). Carry basic supplies, including food containing simple sugars to generate heat quickly and fluid to drink.

Bites & Stings

Bee and wasp stings are usually painful rather than dangerous. Calamine lotion or sting-relief spray will give relief and ice packs will reduce the pain and swelling. However, people who are allergic to bees and wasps may suffer severe breathing difficulties and require urgent medical care.

Mongolia has four species of venomous snakes: the Halys viper (*agkistrodon halys*), common European viper or adder (*vipera berus*), Orsini's viper (*vipera ursine*) and the small *taphrometaphon lineolatum*. To minimise your chances of being bitten always wear boots, socks and long trousers where

snakes may be present. Don't put your hands into holes and crevices, and be careful when collecting firewood.

Bedbugs live in various places, but particularly in dirty mattresses and bedding, evidenced by spots of blood on bedclothes or on the wall. Bedbugs leave itchy bites in neat rows. Calamine lotion or a sting-relief spray may help. All lice cause itching and discomfort. They make themselves at home in your hair, your clothing, or in your pubic hair. You catch lice through direct contact with infected people or by sharing combs, clothing and the like. Powder or shampoo treatment will kill the lice and infected clothing should then be washed in very hot, soapy water and left in the sun to dry.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Traditional medicine has made a comeback in Mongolia, after suppression during communism. Medicine often involves the use of native herbs, ground-up rock or bone, and even the swallowing of prayers written on tiny pieces of paper. Lamas are often employed to read prayers for the sick. Traditional medicine here is based on both Chinese and Tibetan practices. In Ulaanbaatar, there are traditional-medicine clinics at the Bakula Rinpoche Süm (see p76).