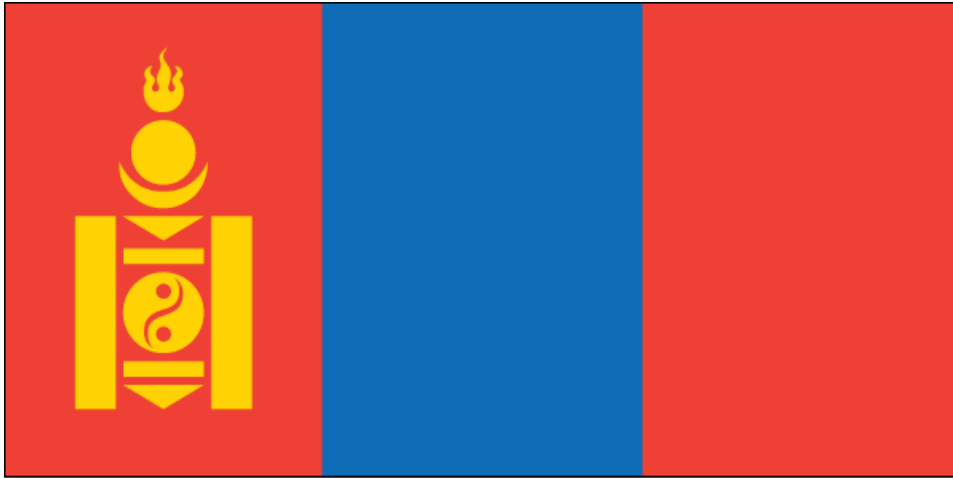


# Mongolia

*Монгол улс*



NAME: **Mongolia**  
CAPITAL: **Ulaanbaatar**  
LANGUAGE: **Mongol**  
RELIGION: **Tibetan Buddhism &  
Others**  
CURRENCY: **Tugrik**

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

Summers in [Mongolia](#) can be very rainy in the north, but temperatures peak during this time so many still find it to be an attractive time to visit. Ulaanbaatar boasts daily highs of about 72°F (22-23°C) during the summer, but night temperatures still drop to only about 50°F (10°C). This season allows easy travel options as the roads are cleared of snow and transportation options tend to fall as there are little obstacles to travel; this is also the busiest tourist season, but in Mongolia "busy tourist season" has a different meaning than most places as it remains a fairly unknown destination. Winters are the opposite extreme with highs of only 5-15°F (-10 to -15°C), but still fairly sunny most days; unfortunately, this season makes transportation nearly impossible with snow closing many roads and a trip to a nomadic village off the travel itinerary. Falls (autumn) can be cold and receive snow, while springs seem to be the worst for visitors to Mongolia. After the long winters the nomads are busy tending to their animals, many roads are not cleared of snow, the plains are windy, and temperatures are still cold. For a true cultural experience this is the time to visit as few other tourists will be present, but what you have access to will be severely limited.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options, so make sure you look into this before booking your trip. Here is a list of [Mongolia's Holiday Schedule](#).

### Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit

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weather websites like [weather.com](http://weather.com); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

## **Tours & Cruises**

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Gecko's Adventures](#): Active in "responsible" tourism, Gecko's Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food in small group settings.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Mongolia's Official Tourism Website](#): This site lists tour operators and tour agencies officially licensed and based in Mongolia.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

## **Guidebooks**

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Mongolia](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there is one guidebook available for travel in Mongolia.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

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# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

[Mongolia](#) today seems to be a forgotten country with one of the most significant and historically important pasts of all the world. Despite the fact that Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan hailed from this out-of-the-way country, the people are modest and humble, using that past more as a basis for their modern day culture than as an excuse to act superior.

Since the days that Genghis Khan ruled over the world's largest empire, the [Mongols](#) have been the victims of their, now more powerful and influential neighbors. This recent past and the introduction of Buddhism have made the people humble, while still remembering their history under Genghis and Kublai Khan. Even today, Mongolian culture is rooted in the days of these great rulers. Like then, the people today remain united as they are resilient, proving their adaptability through their ability to live off the land as they care for animals and move with the seasons as nomads. This lifestyle however is slowly dying as the cities are growing, leaving their *gers* behind, but taking their culture and mentality with them into the future.

The [Mongols](#) have a proud past, which both their neighbors discourage. The people view themselves as "Mongols," but their strong neighbors in [Russia](#) and [China](#) were the victims of Genghis Khan's conquests so have tried to suppress Mongol history. Despite these efforts, the people are aware of this past and that's the root of their identity: the life of strong, powerful, proud, people who used the land and animals for survival as the seasons changed. To be Mongol is essentially defined by the ethnicity, but another part of that identity is their ability to adapt and used the resources they have at hand. For this reason, much business is conducted in Russian as the usefulness of this language overcomes the pride of the Mongol language, which is not the primarily defining factor in their identity.

## History

[Mongolian](#) history begins with the nomadic people on the plains. Their first step towards unity was in about 300 BC when the Huns united to create a loosely organized government. However after this unity, little changed as the people continued their lives as nomads on the plains. Even at times when political rule fell apart, life didn't change much for the people as they moved with their animals during the seasons.

The 700s brought the next wave of change as the Uyghurs (an ethnic [Turkish](#) group) entered the scene and ruled over the Huns or [Mongols](#), but never formed a strong government, although they did introduce communication and educational changes.

Again, life carried on until the 1100s when these people, now a mix of a number of ethnicities, united under a [Mongol](#) named Temujin (Genghis Khan). By the early 1200s he had united all the tribes and began overrunning neighboring peoples. Under his rule education expanded further and the Mongol culture was quickly changing as these tribes that once were separate were now communicating and working together.

During and after Genghis Khan's rule the [Mongols](#) became successful warriors as they overran dozens of people, including the powerful [Chinese](#). Eventually, their empire became too vast to control and it fell into a number of kingdoms. The strongest of these was based in modern day [Beijing](#) and for some time was ruled over by Kublai Khan, who started China's short-lived Yuan Dynasty. The most significant impact this time period had on modern day Mongolia was that many of the Mongols converted to Buddhism with the encouragement from the Tibetans.

By about 1400 nearly all the kingdoms had fallen and the Mongols were retreating with the advance of the powerful [Central Asian](#) leader, Timur. This fall from power continued into the 1500s and 1600s. The [Chinese](#) regularly raided the cities and as each empire collapsed the [Mongols](#) left behind were isolated among the natives, only modern day

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Mongolia remaining primarily Mongol. It was during this time however, that Tibetan and Mongol relations blossomed and it was actually the Mongols who bestowed the title "Dalai Lama" on the Tibetan leader and current lama reincarnation.

The 1700s saw much of the same the 1600s saw, as the people essentially were under [Chinese](#) Qing rule confined to the fields as serfs. This did not change until the Qing was on the verge of collapse in the late 1800s and early 1900s. With their collapse in 1911, the [Mongols](#) quickly declared independence and turned to neighboring Russia for support. Due to revolution in [Russia](#) and in China, but with no military, Mongolia was at the mercy of their neighbors and after some setbacks gained full independence in 1921, which placed Mongolia in civil war.

The [Mongolian](#) civil war was short lived as the Soviets supported the communist movement in the country and this support led to a decisive victory. The new government imitated the Soviet government and began collectivizing and suppressing religious and political rights.

After World War II (WWII), in which [Mongolia](#) sided with the Soviets and Allied forced, they found a communist government in [China](#) and hence good relations on both sides. This ended with the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, which essentially forced Mongolia to pick a side and they chose the Soviet Union.

Under communist rule, the [Mongols](#) received improved infrastructure, communication, education, and healthcare, however their economy struggled. As much of the communist world fell in the late 1980s and early 1990s the Mongols protested their government and many people began a hunger strike. The government submitted after just three days and Mongolia has since been democratic.

Since the early 1990s [Mongolia](#) has been fairly stable politically, but still marred regular by economic problems, however none of which have been insurmountable.

## Dress & Behavior

While the [Mongols](#) in large cities are fairly accepting of all dress, including showing legs or arms, in the countryside the people are more conservative and will oddly stare at you, and not just because you're foreign. Most Mongolians will frown upon dress that is too revealing or too tight so, even in cities, dress on the conservative side when in doubt.

Some of the population, particularly in the western part of the country, is Muslim. If in a Muslim area, there are a number of religious laws which should be obeyed. Women should cover their hair at all times in public and both women and men are expected to cover their legs and shoulders; showing your knees and/or shoulders can be very offensive. Adult women may also receive some odd looks if traveling in Muslim areas alone.

Islamic law also forbids pork products and alcohol and these must be avoided if with the Muslim population. Again, in the cities and in much of the country, where the people are primarily Buddhist, there is no offence in eating pork or drinking alcohol although some religious holidays restrict consuming these items. To learn more about dining etiquette in [Mongolia](#), continue reading below.

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# Food

## Dining Etiquette

Dining etiquette in [Mongolia](#) is fairly relaxed, especially for foreigners, who the locals don't hold to their dining rules. The most important meal in Mongolia is breakfast and it is rare to be invited into a local's home as dining at a restaurant is more common for people outside of one's family. However, if you do by chance get invited to a Mongolian's home and they live in a *ger*, there are a number of very important rules you must know.

Before entering a *ger* you should shout "nokhoi khor!" which means "hold the dogs!" Of course you're probably in no real danger of an actual dog attack, but this is how the locals ask to enter a *ger*. Once you're invited in, completely enter as stopping in the entryway or threshold is bad luck. When inside you will notice two large beams, which stand near the center and are the primary supports for the *ger*; don't walk between these two poles as, again, this is bad luck. Also, always move to the left once inside and greet the elders first.

Although the locals are forgiving in regard to dining rules, you should still try your best to behave to their standards. Rules from one region to the next vary so pay particular attention to the behavior of others, but there are a few rules that exist across the country. Only use your right hand to eat, both when touching food and when using utensils. It is also rude to point your knife at another person. The final important thing to remember is that when passing dishes, hold the dish with your right hand and use your left hand to symbolically support your right elbow. This symbolizes the vast quantity of food and is a compliment to the host.

Finally, you may be offered an alcoholic beverage to drink and you are expected to drink this, especially men, whose manhood is in part determined by his ability to hold liquor.

## History & Influences

The [Mongolian](#) diet is based on their historic roots as herders and nomads and this has changed little over time. That history has given the people a diet based on meats, fats, and dairy. Additionally, due to a harsh climate, fruits and vegetables have short growing seasons and only hardy vegetation can survive at all, giving the people further reliance on their meat and dairy-based diet.

The only true outside influences to alter the Mongolian diet are from the neighboring people that they have encountered as nomads or through invasion. The [Central Asian](#) people have given them a small influence, but have naturally maintained a similar diet; their biggest influence has been in the form of spices. The [Chinese](#) have encouraged the [Mongolians](#) to consume more rice, noodles, and dumplings, all of which are fairly common in Mongolia today. The [Russians](#) have also introduced a number of dishes and ingredients, but their influence has been less significant than the influence the Chinese had.

Today, the [Mongolian](#) diet still relies on meat, fats, and dairy along with a couple outside spices and ingredients.

## Staple Foods

There are no true staple foods in [Mongolia](#), although nearly every dish will contain meat and a dairy product.

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Boodog:** entire roasted goat carcass cooked via hot stones put in the stomach

**Buuz:** steamed dumplings filled with meat

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## Drinks

Knowing the historic [Mongolian](#) diet, it is of little surprise that the most authentic drinks in Mongolia are dairy-based. *Aaruul* is a curdled milk, *himiin arkhi* is a yogurt drink and when tea is offered, it typically contains milk.

Nearly every type of alcohol is available in [Mongolia](#). Vodka is common from the strong alliance Mongolia had with [Russia](#) and various rice wines from [China](#) are also popular. The most authentic Mongolian drink is *airag*, which is fermented mare's milk.

# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Mongolia](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Official Website of Mongolia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade](#) or your nearest Mongolian Embassy.

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Mongolia](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Mongolia didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Mongolia](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

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**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Mongolian Airlines:** [Eznis Airways](#) & [MIAT Mongolian Airlines](#)

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Conglomerates:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** Camping (in western terms) is still a foreign concept in Morocco. Many Mongolians still live in mobile *gers* and some will welcome foreigners in for the night, although this is best pre-arranged through a tour company as most tour operators in Mongolia have *ger* stay options available. Some national parks will

also allow camping, but check in advance to understand requirements and availability.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

[Mongolia](#) is on a similar time schedule as much of northern [Europe](#). Shops and the workday tend to open at about 8:00-9:00 am and close at about 5:00 pm, but inconsistencies exist, particularly in the countryside. Most places close on weekends, which are Saturdays and Sundays in Mongolia, although most restaurants are open seven days a week.

[Mongolia](#) is relatively inexpensive on [European](#) standards. Hostels and even some hotels can easily be found for as little as 7,000-20,000 tughrík (\$5-15) a night per person, while business and western hotels (which only really exist in Ulaanbaatar) can start at about 200,000 tughrík (\$150). Food can range a little, from as little as 2,000 tughrík (\$1-2) to about 40,000 tughrík (\$30) for a nice restaurant. Local transportation costs are also fairly reasonable if you take public transportation and even taxis rarely cost more than 7,000 tughrík (\$5) for a cross-city journey if you are a good negotiator.

Generally there is no tipping in [Mongolia](#), however there are a couple exceptions. If dining in a western restaurant or staying at a western hotel tips are expected, 10% being a good tip.

When using public restrooms there is at times an old woman standing guard, who demands money, this is not a tip, it is a bathroom fee. Some will even charge different amounts for the use of urinals versus toilets, but none ever seem to supply toilet paper unless you want to dish out more money at the door.

## Crime & Safety

[Mongolia](#) is a relatively safe place to visit. Petty theft exists, but isn't prevalent and violent crimes are ever rarer. The greatest threats are in the hazards of the roads and in hiking or trekking in the wilderness.

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