

# Discover the Gobi

## 8 days | Starts/Ends: Ulaan Baatar



*The Gobi desert is a treasure chest of fossilised dinosaur bones and eggs. It is a land of steppe, mountains and the second biggest desert in the world. Enjoy horse-riding, camel riding, desert, sand dunes and museums on this exploration of a fascinating region.*

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- Ulaan Baatar - provincial capital city of Mongolia on the banks of the Tuul River
- Terelj National Park - stunning Alpine like natural beauty
- Canyon of Yolyn Am and Nomad family
- Bayanzag - Flaming Cliffs
- Sandunes of Moltsoq Els

#### What's Included

- Arrival and departure transfers on day 1 and day 8
- 4 nights hotel, 3 nights tourist Ger camps
- 7 Breakfasts, 6 lunches, 7 dinners
- City tour of Ulaan Baatar
- Natural History Museum Ulaan Baatar
- Gandan Monastery and Migjid Janraisag Temple
- Terelj National Park
- Economy class flights - Ulaan Baatar to Gobi and Dalanzadgad to Ulaan Baatar

- Canyon of Yolyn Am, Nature Museum, Camel Breeding facility
- Bayanzag excursion, Moltsoq Els
- Bogd Khaan Winter Palace and National History Museum.
- English speaking guide

#### What's Not Included

- Flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Day 1 : Ulaan Baatar

Arrival in Ulaan Baatar and transfer to the hotel. Enjoy a city orientation tour and visit the Natural History Museum. In the evening, experience a Mongolian folklore and dance show, followed by dinner. **Overnight - Ulaan Baatar (D)**

#### Day 2 : Terelj National Park

This morning visit Gandan monastery and Migjid Janraisag temple. Afterwards, you head out to Terelj National Park, a pristine nature reserve, full of ger camps and unusual rock formations. Lunch is served at a ger camp, after which you go to Turtle Rock and later have the opportunity to go horse riding. By late afternoon drive back to Ulaan Baatar for dinner. **Overnight - Ulaan Bataar (B, L, D)**

#### Day 3 : Fly to Gobi



Ulaan Baatar - Gobi. Transfer to the airport for the flight to Gobi (1.20 hrs). Transfer to the tourist camp and have an introduction to the surrounding area. **Overnight - Ger camp (B, L, D)**

#### Day 4 : Canyon of Yolyn Am

Today you will discover the tribune of nomads. Travel to the Canyon of Yolyn Am – a canyon of a river (Valley of Eagle). The trip today includes a visit the Nature museum and a camel breeding family. There is the option to go camel riding, before driving back to the ger camp.

**Overnight - Ger camp (B, L, D)**

#### Day 5 : Flaming Cliffs and Saksaul forest

Today there is an excursion to Bayanzag (Flaming Cliffs) where it's possible to see the Saksaul forest in the desert, home to complete dinosaur skeletons and fossilised eggs which are still being found today. You'll

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also visit the spectacular sand dunes of Moltsoq Els. **Overnight - Ger camp** (B, L, D)

## Day 6 : Fly to Ulaan Baatar



Gobi - Ulaan Baatar. Transfer from Dalanzadgad to the airport for your flight back to Ulaan Baatar. Upon arrival transfer to the hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

**Overnight - Ulaan Baatar** (B, L, D)

## Day 7 : Bogd Khaan Winter Palace

This morning visit the Bogd Khaan Winter Palace and the National History museum. Spend the afternoon at leisure to further explore the city and pick up any last minute souvenirs. **Overnight - Ulaan Baatar** (B, L, D)

## Day 8 : Ulaan Baatar

After breakfast onward transfer to the airport or train station. (B)

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

#### Style of Travel

Our Trans-Siberian Railway journeys run as an independent package, combining the train journey and stopovers, booked specifically and exclusively for you.

You will not be travelling in a group and will not have a group 'tour' leader with you. You could be sharing your train carriage with Russians, Mongolians or Chinese and may find you are the only Westerner. Half the fun of the train journey is trying to communicate with your fellow travellers, learning new card games, taking time out to read or just sit back and watch the world go by.

If stopping at intermediate points en route, you will be met on arrival by one of our local drivers (who sometimes can speak English) and transferred to your accommodation. We

offer a range of optional excursions that you can book before you travel or you can choose to independently explore each port of call.

#### Are You A Trans-Siberian Traveller?

If you like everything to happen like clockwork, for everyone you encounter to speak English on command and cannot cope without 24 hour assistance from a travel representative, then a Trans-Siberian adventure is probably not the type of holiday for you!

Our Trans-Siberian railway journeys are suitable for adventurous, independent travellers, in search of new and sometimes intrepid experiences.

Please be aware that hotels and homestays en route are simple.

Though the cabins are cosy, the trains themselves are basic and whilst on-board you'll need to be happy to go without standard creature comforts such as a shower. On arrival, though friendly our transfer drivers are hired for their driving skills and do not always speak English.

Finally, do as much preliminary reading as possible. Both Russian and Mongolian cities and people are quite different to anything you will have encountered before. You may find that some the locals in Russia can be quite abrupt and curt at times and that the customer service offered at hotels en route, is not up to the high standard that we've come to expect in the West. You need to take this with a pinch of salt, it's just the Russian way, expect your service without a smile!

As long as you're aware of all these facts, you'll be mentally prepared for this epic journey!

#### Hotels

We provide simple 3 star hotel accommodation on all of our Trans-Siberian journeys, with en suite rooms and breakfast included. However please note that in Siberia and Mongolia officially rated 3 star accommodation cannot be compared to

hotels of a similar standard in Western Europe or, and in particular, the United States.

#### Train Schedules

Trans-Siberian Railways do change their schedules from time to time, which could alter the itinerary. Please check with us at time of booking.

#### Upgrades

If you wish to upgrade to a 2 berth cabin or a party of 3 wishing to exclusively occupy a 4 berth cabin, please contact us for rates and availability. Please note availability is limited with some trains only configured with one 2 berth cabin wagon (containing 18 seats) and on services between Irkutsk and Ulan Ude, 2 berth cabins are not available. From May - October, all routes are particularly busy, and an upgrade may prove difficult to obtain. On The Go Tours will advise on an individual basis, whether an upgrade will be possible.

Despite the myth, Cabins with shower or en-suite facilities do not exist. However there is a WC/wash basin is located at the end of every wagon, with a 220v AC 2-pin razor socket.

#### Visas

Visas are required by all visitors to China, Mongolia & Russia. If booking at On The Go we will supply your Russian Invitation, required for a Russia visa.

If you're a resident of the UK and would like someone to handle your visa application for you then we recommend CIBTvisas. Please visit <http://www.cibtvisas.co.uk/onthego> for details.

It is your responsibility to procure your visa in a timely fashion and visa fees are at your own expense. We recommend you apply for visas at least 6 weeks prior to departure. Further visa info is available online at [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com).

#### Time & voltage

One of the most disorienting aspects of the Trans-Siberian is working out what time it really is! On Chinese trains, everything works to Beijing Time so train and station clocks are set to this. The time will change again to Ulaan

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Baatar time in Mongolia & Moscow Time in Russia. Pack a travel alarm clock!

## Russia and Mongolia

Standard voltage is 220V, 50Hz AC. Sockets require a Continental or European plug with two round pins.

## China

Standard voltage is 220V, 50Hz AC. Chinese plugs come in at least 4 designs: 3-pronged angle pins as used in Australia; 3-pronged round pins as used in Hong Kong; 2-pronged flat pins as used in the USA; or 2 round narrow pins as used in Europe.

Pack a worldwide travel adaptor.

## Vaccinations

It is suggested that you are vaccinated against Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid and Hepatitis A. If visiting Yekaterinburg between May-August, immunisations against Tick-borne Encephalitis is recommended. Requirements change so please check this information with your GP or Travel Doctor.

## What to pack

- A Frameless rucksack/backpack.
- Small daypack or bag for your valuables.
- Summer - Russia, Mongolia and China can be surprisingly warm during July & August, so it's suggested you pack accordingly with lightweight cottons (warmer clothes for evening).
- Winter – Russia, Mongolia and China get very cold and can experience frigid conditions October - March. Pack a scarf, top quality gloves, hat, thermal leggings and a heavy longer length coat. Wear water and slip-proof shoes or boots.
- Personal first aid kit (see 'Health precautions'), mosquito repellent & sunscreen (summer).
- Sunglasses, umbrella, torch, pocket knife, money belt & universal adaptor plug.
- Bathers/swimmers/trunks & towel for Russian banyas/sauna, lake swimming etc.
- Headscarf (ladies only) for entry into churches.
- Aboard the train - mug, spoon, instant coffee, tea bags, drinking chocolate, cuppa soups and pot noodles, chocolate bars, fruit such as oranges, snacks, slippers, plenty of

reading material, pack of cards, puzzles, MP3 player, radio, Trans-Sib guide book, phrase books, small gifts from your country, flat-pack WC paper, wipes, pack-lock (for your pack).

- Two spare passport photos/passport photocopy in case of loss/theft.
- Your luggage should not exceed 20kg (44pounds). Pack light and leave room for souvenirs!

## What is it like aboard?

Plan to dress casually in T-shirts, jeans or jogging pants and comfortable shoes. Temperatures are regulated regardless of the season, so short-sleeves may be all that is needed.

Generally, each train is around 15 wagons long. At the end of each wagon, is a WC/ wash basin. Each wagon is manned by a provodnitsa (wagon attendant).

All routes longer than 24 hours have a buffet/dining car service (operated by the railway company of the country you are in). Available to all passengers, you can sit down to café style food, paid for in local currency. Occasionally there is a shower available in the 'special services' wagon' for an additional cost of approx: USD \$5 and you will need to provide your own toiletries, towel and shower shoes.

## Luggage - suitcase or backpack?

Most people find that a frameless backpack/ rucksack is easier to manoeuvre and preferable to a suitcase. They are easier to carry and stow on-board, and do not have wheels which can get mired in snow and dirt.

## Luggage Stowage

Train cabins offer a surprising amount of luggage space - beneath the bottom bunks and near the ceiling. It's a good idea to keep your valuables on you, and luggage should be locked at all times. Trains are used by Chinese, Mongolian and Russian traders, who try to use all available space for their goods and may try to store goods in your cabin - some sharp words may be needed - You are entitled enough space to store your luggage, which they may forget!

## The cabin

There are usually 4 berths (2 up, 2 down) to a compartment, with plenty of luggage space. The cabin door can be locked by turning the door catch, and pulling a metal catch out to the left of the door. Each cabin has a small table (with bottle opener underneath), a small fold-out ladder to help people to the upper berths and coat hangers and hooks for hanging.

## The provodnitsa

An attendant, known in Russia as a provodnitsa, staffs each train wagon. Their duties include checking your tickets, distributing pre-packaged linen (at additional and nominal cost) and keeping the public areas of the wagon clean. They also keep their eye on the WC, samovar and the cabins. Flashing your biggest grin upon boarding may keep you in favour with them during the journey!

## The routes

The term 'Trans-Siberian Railway' is used to describe the 3 main train routes which traverse the Eurasian continent. Starting in Moscow, all routes run parallel through Yaroslavl on the Volga, Yekaterinburg in the Urals and traverse Siberia. Soon after Irkutsk near Baikal's southern extremity, they diverge with the Trans-Siberian route continuing to Vladivostok and the other two continuing on to Beijing:

**The Trans-Mongolian route:** Moscow - Ulaan Baatar - Beijing: Just beyond Ulan Ude on Baikal's east shore, it heads south across the Mongolian steppe to Ulaan Baatar and Beijing.

**The Trans-Manchurian route:** Moscow - Beijing. Just after Tarskaya, this route heads around the eastern border of Mongolia to Beijing.

## Boarding the train

All trains to Irkutsk, Ulaan Baatar and Beijing depart from Moscow Yaroslavl Station. Trains to Yekaterinburg depart from Moscow Kazanskaya Station. The nearest Metro stop is KOMSOMOLSKAYA. Both stations offer kiosks for the purchase of snacks and drinks.

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There are toilet facilities and seated waiting areas.

## Border crossings

Be prepared for long and tedious border delays, primarily due to passenger numbers and the volume of contraband the traders are carrying. Most of the time, you'll be on-board, though if you're asked or decide to disembark, take your coat and valuables. If you're not allowed off, remember the toilets will be out of action whilst you're halted. Overall, expect delays of some 5-6 hours.

## Russia-Mongolia border

Both Russia and Mongolia use the same railway gauge so a 'bogie-change' is not required at this border. Officials, however, take their time searching the compartments of Russian and Mongolia traders looking for goods that attract duty. You'll usually be subject to customs and immigration checks at both Naushki on the Russian side and Sukhbaatar in Mongolia and be required to complete the appropriate forms.

## Mongolia-China border

Most trains cross this border at night, so expect little sleep. You'll be subjected to customs and immigration checks at Zamyn-Uud in Mongolia and Erlian in China and customs forms will need to be completed. Once your passport is returned, you're usually free to disembark and look around.

The train's bogies are changed at Erlian. If wanting to watch, stay on the train until it reaches the bogie changing sheds. Here, the carriages are raised and the bogies are replaced with those used in China. You may be able to take photos. You can then walk or take a rickshaw back to the station proper.

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