



# The Trans-Mongolian Route

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## Route Info

- » Distance: 2217km
- » Duration: Two days six hours
- » Time zones: Ulan-Ude: Moscow +5; Ulaanbaatar and Dàtóng: Moscow +4

## Best Places to Stay & Eat

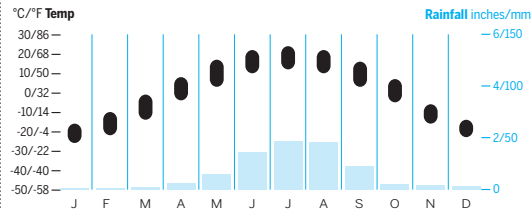
- » Lotus Guesthouse (p277)
- » Zaya Backpacker Hostel (p277)
- » Ulaanbaatar Hotel (p277)
- » Tóngtiě Binguǎn hotel (p289)
- » Millie's Espresso cafe (p278)
- » Mongolians restaurant (p278)

## Why Go?

The Trans-Mongolian route is the most diverse leg of the cross-continental journey, cutting across three distinct cultures, landscapes and languages. It includes some of the most awe-inspiring sights of the long journey, not the least of which is the Great Wall of China, but also the Gobi Desert and the vast Mongolian steppes, still the domain of horse-bound nomads. The major jumping-off point is Ulaanbaatar. Many travellers plan their visit around the colourful Naadam Festival, but a visit any time of year reveals a surprisingly fast-paced city with great cultural attractions and heady nightlife. Before heading for Mongolia from Russia, pause to explore Ulan-Ude, where you could leave the train briefly for a minibus ride to the border, taking in the historic towns of Novoseleginsk and Kyakhta. The China leg is a relatively short hop but has its own unique character, highlighted by the beguiling Yungang Caves near Dàtóng.

## When to Go

### Ulaanbaatar



**mid-Jul** Naadam grinds Ulaanbaatar to a halt to make way for wrestling, archery and horse racing.

**Aug** Prime time for lounging in Ulaanbaatar's open-air cafes, swapping travel stories.

**Sep** Autumn brings changing colours in forested areas and smaller tourist crowds.



## Trans-Mongolian Route Highlights

- 1 Enjoying a meal of boiled mutton and fermented mare's milk in a ger (yurt) on the vast **Mongolian steppes** (p285)
- 2 Attending a mystical ceremony at the country's largest monastery, Ulaanbaatar's **Gandan Khiid** (p272)
- 3 Browsing through the collection of stuffed animals,

curios and artefacts at Ulaanbaatar's **Winter Palace of the Bogd Khan** (p272)

- 4 Spotting rare wild horses at **Khustain National Park** (p285)
- 5 Staring in wonder at the 51,000 Buddhist statues inside the **Yungang Caves** (p288) near Dàtóng

- 6 Exploring the antiquated town of **Kyakhta** (p269) on the Mongolian–Russian border, once home to a thriving trading post on the ancient tea route
- 7 Celebrating **Naadam** (p280), Mongolia's mid-summer festival that features the country's best wrestlers, archers and race horses