



MONGOLIA SOVIET TOUR

TOUR OVERVIEW

May - 2000 USD
6-night tour in Mongolia

SUMMARY

The Soviet Union lasted from 1917 to 1991 and it influenced almost every part of the globe in some way or another.

Russia became the world's first communist country after the October Revolution in 1917 and quickly, many of the countries which were part of the Russian Empire were swallowed up and renamed to align with the expanding Soviet Union. Some surrounding countries were also pulled into the fold as the Union sought to expand, including Mongolia.

On this tour, you'll be accompanied by a western tour leader resident in Mongolia as well as a local guide and local experts at some of the sites we visit. We'll travel to some of the country's best kept secrets from its communist past, from Soviet fighter jets to hidden statues of Lenin and from communist border towns to fully-operational military bases.

So strap in and prepare to dive back through time to Soviet Mongolia.

SAFETY

At Koryo Tours, our main priority (besides tour enjoyment) is your and the group's safety. Since 2012 we have worked with a local travel agency who help us ensure that the journey is safe in terms of vehicles we use and the areas we visit. You are entering the country as a legal tourist and must obey the local laws and customs. One of our experienced Koryo Tours guides will accompany the trip.

WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

Many passengers visit Mongolia every year, but many only scratch the surface by stopping while on the Trans-Siberian train journey for 3 or 4 days. At Koryo, we will help broaden this experience by taking you further, and off of the central tourist route, to gain a better experience and understanding of this truly unique country. With visits to abandoned air bases, derelict Soviet towns, and stunning Stalinist monuments, you will not be disappointed!

The Experts in Travel to Rather Unusual Destinations



DAILY ITINERARY

DAY 1

Arrival Day & Ulaanbaatar's Soviet Heart

This tour begins at our hotel, a real Soviet treat, the **Hotel Ulaanbaatar**.

Once you have checked in, we're raring to go; first up, only a stone's throw from our hotel, is **Sükhbaatar Square**. Named after Mongolia's revolutionary hero Damdin Sükhbaatar shortly after his death in 1923, the square's name was briefly changed to Genghis Square, much to the ire of many local people, so in 2016 it was reverted to its original moniker.

At the centre of the square stands an equestrian **statue of Damdin Sükhbaatar**, while a large monument dedicated to **Genghis Khan** sits atop the steps of the **government palace**.

To the northeast of **Sükhbaatar Square** is the **National University of Mongolia**, established in 1942. We'll visit to view its Soviet architecture and catch a glimpse of the statue of **Khorloogiin Choibalsan**. Choibalsan was known by some as the Stalin of Mongolia as he oversaw the purges of the 1930s which resulted in the deaths of over 35,000 people.

We continue on foot through the city, glimpsing some of the old Soviet apartment blocks on the way to our next stop, the **State Department Store**. Established in 1921, this relic from the Soviet period has seen many changes; however, it's worth visiting as it still has a few older corners oozing communist heritage.

Across from the **State Department Store**, we call at the **Beetles statue**: the beetles never visited Mongolia, but there is indeed a beautiful statue erected for them. The story goes that local people had it built from their funds after the soviet period in memory of the music they listened to.

Before dinner, we stroll back to our hotel past the **National Academic Drama Theater, Mongolian Stock Exchange** and **The National Theater**, all excellent examples of Soviet design and construction. After a briefing, we will head out into the city once more for dinner.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Hotel Ulaanbaatar



DAY 2

Ulaanbaatar Soviet City Tour

This morning, after breakfast, it's straight out as we begin our exploration of Ulaanbaatar. We'll take a bus since we're travelling a bit further afield than yesterday.

The **Mongolian Military Museum** is an ageing museum that's home to a plethora of Soviet-era military hardware from MiG fighter jets, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns and tanks, and that's only on the outside. The museum interior covers history from the Mongol Empire right the way through to its more recent Soviet past. After our visit, it's on to the former home of, and now museum to, **Marshall Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov**.

The Marshall Zhukov House Museum is a small but exciting affair, especially for those interested in the period; it opened in 1979 and it's in this very house that Zhukov stayed from 1939-1940 as he directed Soviet troops in the battle of Tavan Gol. We'll get to view his living quarters as well as pictures, maps and weapons from around the time of the Soviet defeat of the Japanese army at this little known battle. Across the road from the Zhukov house, we'll pay a visit to the **Marshall Zhukov Statue**. Located in a small square, a rather splendid bust of the hero of the Soviet Union.

Hoping that you're not too tired of statues, we have a real treat for you as we continue by bus and call at the father of all Soviet statues, **Lenin**. Once located in front of our very own **Ulaanbaatar Hotel**, this **Lenin statue** was commissioned in 1951 and stood for many years until it was taken down in 2012 by the then-mayor of Ulaanbaatar.

Following a hearty lunch in a restaurant from the Soviet period, we'll head into the city, stopping at local apartments to view mosaics, still in place decorating the ends of traditional 1950's apartment blocks.

Our final destination of the day prepares us perfectly for our overnight train as we stop at the **Ulaanbaatar Open Air Railway Museum**. This pre-dinner visit houses six locomotives used throughout the last 65 years. Many of the engines still have their Soviet detailing and imagery, including a large image of Joseph Stalin.

As evening approaches, we board our local train to Dornogovi Province's Sainshand town. We'll have four-berth cabins as we trundle through the night across Mongolia's vast wilderness.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Overnight Train



DAY 3

Exploring Soviet Towns

We'll arrive in the early morning at **Sainshand Town**. After alighting the train, for those awake enough, we will pause to view the small, but well-appointed Soviet outpost train station before heading into town for a basic breakfast.

Sainshand Town is the capital of **Dornogovi Province** and lies due south-east of Ulaanbaatar, sitting to the east of the Gobi desert surrounded by scrub and flat arid terrain. This remote town is a real mix of old and new, only 130 miles from the Chinese border this position made **Sainshand** an essential military base during the Sino Soviet split.

Sainshand was once home to the air-missile intelligence stations of the Soviet Union; these would protect the underbelly of Russia from possible attack from a hostile China. The town was separated into three distinct areas, north, south, and east; unfortunately, in modern times, the northern section has been destroyed and used to construct newer buildings; the east was sealed off for use by the Mongolian air force.

Following breakfast, we will see what remains of the town's once Soviet past as we look to the southern area of this frontier settlement. Luckily for us, a little still remains, mainly used for habitation and business for local people.

After lunch, we drive 2 hours north to the village of **Shivee-Ovoo**. This small habitation was once home to the Soviet motorized rifle division; believe it or not, there were up to fifteen-thousand soldiers once here. These days all that remains in this desolate windswept area are the former homes built for the servicemen and their families and the officer's mess. A little exploring will also reveal a few mosaics.

Once we have finished our Soviet exploration for the day, we have our final drive to the provincial capital, **Choir**. Once here, we locate a local restaurant for our evening meal and then head to our hotel for tonight situated in one of the former Soviet districts block apartments.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Art Hotel



DAY 4

From Yuri Gagarin to Soviet Bases

After breakfast, we're ready to continue our exploration of **Choir**, heading to the Soviet-style **Choir Railway Station**, outside of which is a **Statue of Yuri Gagarin** built to commemorate the flight into space of Mongolia's first cosmonaut Jüggerdemidiin Gürragchaa in 1981.

During the Soviet period, Choir housed the most extensive military base for the Soviet Union, but that has long gone with many of the buildings dismantled. We will have a little explore and make sure to visit the 25-meter high statue erected in honour of the USSR's war heroes.

Upon leaving Choir, we'll continue north, and, after a while, we'll make a stop at one of the region's former airbases. Here it gets a little interesting as we have the opportunity for a bit of 'urbex' (urban exploration) and see one of the abandoned **MiG monuments** (a former MIG fighter jet raised pointing skyward). We will also be permitted to enter the former base to see around some of the remaining airfield buildings if we're lucky.

From here, we'll drive onwards to check on another former Soviet airbase located in the town of **Bagakhangai**; we'll see if we can obtain permission to enter the area and its aircraft hangers. Around the town, there are also some abandoned buildings worthy of a few minutes of our time.

Once we have finished it's onwards; our drive takes us across the rolling countryside to the city of **Baganuur**. Baganuur was created to serve the Soviet military base, which was home to the 12th Motor Rifle Division. The Russians have gone now, but the city retains much of its former Soviet design and currently serves the nearby Baganuur coal mine.

As we arrive late today, we head straight to our hotel for dinner and then some well-deserved rest.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | TBC



DAY 5

Abandoned Soviet Settlements to the Red Hero City

We're up and out early, once again driving out of Baganuur further east to have a look at what remains of the base that once belonged to the 12th Motor Rifle Division. Much of this has now gone taken down and recycled, although some of the living quarters still remain and offer us a little more 'urbex'.

Once we have finished climbing the rubble of the Soviet base, we board our vehicles and begin to make our way back to the **Red Hero City, Ulaanbaatar**. As we journey back, we will stop at one of the small towns that serve the still functioning aerodrome; the town itself may not be so exciting, but the **MiG 21** in the children's play area is well worth a visit.

As we make our way back, we'll stop at a more modern statue built for the ancient leader Genghis Khan. Finished in 2008, the **Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue** makes for a great visit, offering views over the surrounding countryside.

Once we return to Ulaanbaatar, we will visit the home of a local resident who has, over the years, amassed an impressive array of **Lenin statues and memorabilia**. He loves to meet interested visitors to proudly show off and talk about his collection.

Once we've arrived and checked back into our hotel, you'll have the rest of the day to rest and relax.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch

Overnight | Ulaanbaatar Hotel



DAY 6

Soviet Ulaanbaatar

Today is another day of exploring the nation's capital, Ulaanbaatar. This morning, we're out on foot to visit the nearby Mongolian National Gallery. This impressive building houses many of the artworks of Mongolia. As well as the art, the architecture here is terrific, incorporating some fantastic mosaics and stained glass windows from the country's communist past.

From art to dinosaurs, we'll walk further into the city to view some of the small city squares that would have once been adorned with monuments commemorating Mongolia's socialist neighbour but have since been replaced with more nationalistic Mongolian figures and symbols.

Our destination is the Mongolian Dinosaur Museum; this building once housed the nation's Lenin Museum built especially for the father of communism. The outside is adorned with brass reliefs depicting the great man himself as well as Engels and Marx. Although once inside, you may need to use your imagination a little. The architecture remains, although where Lenin statue once stood now stands Mongolia's very own T-Rex!

After a spot of lunch, we'll head across the city to the upmarket Zaisan area; we're not here to drink an overpriced coffee but to climb the 612 steps up the hill to the famed Zaisan monument. Built in 1956, the monument commemorates the friendship between the USSR and Mongolia.

The lower reaches of Zaisan incorporate the Revolutionary Mongol Tank Brigade Monument; this monument combines an original T-34 tank and a map of its journey from manufacture in the Soviet Union to Berlin. Following our tour of the remaining Soviet sites in Ulaanbaatar, we'll return to our hotel before heading out into the city for our last group meal.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Overnight | Ulaanbaatar Hotel



DAY 7

Departure Day

Today, it's time to bid goodbye to Mongolia.

We'll head to **Genghis Khan International Airport** to see you off. Although the tour is over, we hope you'll be flying home with a head full of memories and stories to share with your friends, family and fellow Soviet enthusiasts!

Meals | Breakfast

Overnight | Can Be Arranged

ACCOMMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure from comfortable hotels in Ulaanbaatar to more communist affairs in the southern city of Sainshand.

*All accommodation is based on a shared option.

Single supplement is 55 USD per person: This will guarantee you a single room option in our hotel stay and camping. While in the ger camp, you may still be sharing.

FOOD

Most meals are included in this tour, although there is time allowed in Ulaanbaatar for your exploration. Your tour guide will be able to advise on the options when you arrive

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Vegetarian food choices can be minimal once we leave Ulaanbaatar, although our chef may be able to take special dietary requirements into account on tour. If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure that you let us know in advance.

In this region, the availability of certain specialised products for restricted diets, e.g. gluten-free or dairy-free is minimal or non-existent. As such we would strongly recommend you bring these dietary items if you need them.



TRANSPORT

All ground transport and domestic flights are included in this tour.

VISAS

Many nationalities still require a visa for a visit to Mongolia. Please do not hesitate to contact your tour manager to see if this is the case.

The application process for a Mongolia visa is quite simple; you can apply for a visa yourself at your nearest Mongolian embassy. You will need to fill out an application form and submit one or two passport photos along with your passport. At times you may be required to provide proof of a tour booking with a Mongolian travel company. We can, of course, send this if needed.

PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you can carry and lift your luggage and walk with it for short distances.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack or wheeled luggage, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags or backpacks with wheels are convenient. A lockable bag or small padlock is useful as your luggage may get stowed separately and unattended while out and about.



ESSENTIALS

- Clothing: Daytime temperatures are warm, we recommend lightweight clothing plus some warm layers for that night time temperature drop in high desert areas and the mountains of Mongolia. A good waterproof jacket is always a bonus in case we experience more torrential rains which can occur.
- Day pack — for carrying essentials when exploring destinations like water, camera, snacks, jacket, etc.
- Lightweight clothing/wind and waterproof jacket — a mixture of covering lightweight clothing and some warm layers are recommended. It is best to check the weather and seasonal information before travelling.
- Comfortable — closed-in shoes will help to protect your feet from cuts and scratches when walking through cities as well as bush/grass-lands, and will also act as a barrier protection in rare cases against bites or stings.
- Sun protection (we'll be at some high altitudes!) — hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, and lip balm.
- One large main piece of luggage (lockable) soft hold all, kitbag or frameless rucksack although hard cases can be accepted. Keep luggage to a strict minimum as you will be expected to carry your bag throughout. Porters are not available in Mongolia. Please note that the luggage allowance for the domestic flights at the time of writing is 15kg per person for the hold plus 5kg hand luggage. It is possible to pay for small amounts of excess baggage at the cost of approximately \$3 per kilogram. Excess baggage can also be kept securely in Ulaanbaatar until our return to the city.

RECOMMENDED

- Personal medical kit — we recommend you carry items such as mild painkillers, electrolytes, Band-Aids and insect repellent.
- Water bottle — we recommend a 1.5-litre capacity for which we can provide potable water. Bottled water is also available, but we prefer to use safe drinking water rather than contribute to polluting the environment.
- Spare batteries — our trips have access to power to recharge batteries for phones and cameras most days, but we recommend you take extra batteries for your camera.
- Electrical travel adapter plug.
- Inner sleep sheet/bag for added comfort during overnight stays.
- Money belt.
- Torch or flashlight.
- Hand sanitiser.
- Neck pillow for those long, bumpy drives



OPTIONAL

- Earplugs can be a bonus to guard against street noise and snorers.
- A good book, journal and music player can be an excellent choice for long drives.
- Walking/ trekking poles if needed.
- Images from home — during our trip there will be many opportunities for you to meet and talk with locals. One way to start any conversation is with pictures. We recommend that you bring some photos/postcards of your family, home, city or country where you live, animals peculiar to your country etc.

VALUABLES

Please try to avoid bringing unnecessary valuables, and use your hotel safe. We strongly recommend that you photocopy all relevant documents, e.g. air tickets, passport, vaccination certificates, etc. and keep the copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a photocopy makes it easier to obtain replacements if necessary.

CURRENCY

The official currency of Mongolia is the Tugreg. Mongolia is predominantly a cash economy with most small businesses and shops unable to take a credit card. Only change money at officially authorised currency exchanges; these are often found at banks, hotels and shopping malls. There are ATMs in Ulaanbaatar and other larger towns, but none in rural areas and they may not always accept foreign cards or have enough cash to dispense. US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency; other currencies such as Euros, UK sterling, Russian Rubles, and Chinese Renminbi can be exchanged in Ulaanbaatar.

TRAVELLING ON A GROUP TRIP

As you travel on a group trip, you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling together. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too.

We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group — patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a specific time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting.

We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well — this takes just a little effort on your part.

Due to privacy reasons, we are unable to provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travellers booked on your trip before departure.

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IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTES

- As a responsible tour operator, your safety is our priority. Mongolia is a safe country to visit, but your tour leader and local guides will be able to advise you further about travel in this location.
- This tour is not suited for children under the age of 12 (please check with Tour Manager if you would like to bring a child on tour), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed) and camping in more remote locations.
- If you have a medical condition which may affect your health or safety during your trip, you must inform us before the visa application.
- After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails so you can keep in touch, swap photos etc. If you do not wish to be on this list, then please let us know.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

CANCELLATION If our partners cancel the tour, we will fully refund the tour price. Please note this tour is charged in US\$. If we receive any other currency, this will be converted to US\$ on that day's exchange rate fixed by the Bank of China. Any refund will be made according to the US\$ amount we received and not the original currency sent. With all refunds, Koryo Tours will not be held liable for any bank charges. We do have a deadline for cancellations although due to the nature of travel in Mongolia we may need to book certain services earlier such as flights and hotels. In many cases, these are none refundable. Your tour manager will let you know when this needs to be done. After this it would be impossible to offer a full refund should you then need to cancel.

STANDARD DISCLAIMER: Koryo Tours reserves the right to withdraw service and cancel a tour at any time. In this eventuality, a full refund of any monies paid by the customer will be made.

Koryo Tours cannot be held responsible for any mishap to yourself or your property and in particular any consequence or effects of flight/train cancellation/delay, robbery, sickness, government intervention or other such happenings.

INSURANCE Koryo Tours insist that tourists travelling on all of our tours have full medical insurance. You are advised to insure yourself against any possible risk that may occur and in particular to ensure that sufficient insurance has been obtained in respect of any dependant relatives. It is your responsibility to be covered by insurance which must include medical expenses and the cost of repatriation should you become too ill to continue.