

Language

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Mongolian is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Kazakh, Uzbek and Korean. The traditional Mongolian script looks like Arabic turned 45 degrees, and is still used by the Mongolians living in China (Inner Mongolia, parts of Xinjiang, Qinghai, Liaoning and Jilin). In 1944 the Russian Cyrillic alphabet was adopted, with the two additional characters, *ө* and *ү*. It remains in use today in Mongolia and also in two autonomous republics of Russia: Buryatia and Kalmykia.

Mongolian also has a Romanised form, though the 35 Cyrillic characters give a better representation of Mongolian sounds than the 26 of the Roman alphabet. Partly a result of Russian influence, different Romanisation schemes have been used, and this has caused widespread confusion. A loose standard was adopted in 1987, so the capital city previously written as 'Ulan Bator' (transliterated Russian spelling), is now Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolian pronunciation is not easy. In the words of travel writer Tim Severin, the Mongolian language is '...like two cats coughing and spitting at each other until one finally throws up'. One particular word, which conveys agreement (rather like nodding one's head) is little more than a sharp, guttural intake of breath, as if you were having difficulty breathing.

It's important to give double vowels a long pronunciation, as getting it wrong can affect meaning. Syllables marked in italics in the following words and phrases represent

word stress. If all vowels in a word are short, the first will take the stress and the rest will become 'neutral' (as the 'a' in 'ago'). In words with a long vowel, stress falls on that vowel and any short vowels in the word will become neutral. If there's more than one long vowel the stress will generally fall on the second-last syllable.

If you'd like a more comprehensive guide to the language, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Mongolian Phrasebook*.

ACCOMMODATION

Can you recommend a good hotel?

Та сайн зочид буудал зааж өгнө үү?
ta sain zo-chid buu-dal zaaj ög-nö üü?

Can you show me on the map?

Та газрын зураг дээр зааж өгнө үү?
ta gaz-ryn zu-rag deer zaaj ög-nö üü?

Do you have any rooms available?

Танайд сул өрөө байна уу?
ta-naid sul ö-röö bai-na uu?

I'd like a single room.

Би нэг хүний өрөө авмаар байна.
bi neg khü-nii ö-röö av-maar bai-na

I'd like a double room.

Би хоёр хүний өрөө авмаар байна.
bi kho-yor khü-nii ö-röö av-maar bai-na

What's the price per night/week?

Энэ өрөө хоногт/долоо хоногт ямар үнэтэй вэ?
ene ö-röö kho-nogt/do-loo kho-nogt ya-mar ün-tei ve?

Can I see the room?

Би энэ өрөөг үзэж болох уу?
bi e-ne ö-röög ü-zej bo-lokh uu?

Are there any others?

Өөр өрөө байна уу?
öör ö-röö bai-na uu?

SIX ESSENTIAL PHRASES

Cynics say that the six most widely heard phrases in Mongolia are *medehgui* (don't know), *baikhgui* (don't have), *chadakhui*, (can't do) *magadgui* (maybe), *margaash* (tomorrow) and *za*, which roughly translates to, well, 'za'. *Za* is a catch-all phrase, said at the conclusion of a statement, meaning something akin to 'well ...', 'so then ...' or 'ok', and is a fiendishly addictive word.

THE MONGOLIAN CYRILLIC ALPHABET

А а	a	as the 'u' in 'but'
Г г	g	as in 'get'
Ё ё	yo	as in 'yonder'
И и	i	as in 'tin'
Л л	l	as in 'lamp'
О о	o	as in 'hot'
Р р	r	as in 'rub'
У у	u	as in 'rude'
Х х	kh	as the 'ch' in Scottish <i>loch</i>
Ш ш	sh	as in 'shoe'
Ы ы	y	as the 'i' in 'ill'
Ю ю	yu	as the 'yo' in 'yoyo'
	yü	long, as the word 'you'
Б б	b	as in 'but'
Д д	d	as in 'dog'
Ж ж	j	as in 'jewel'
Й й	i	as in 'tin'
М м	m	as in 'mat'
Ө ө	ö	long, as the 'u' in 'fur'
С с	s	as in 'sun'
Ү ү	ü	long, as the 'o' in 'who'
Ц ц	ts	as in 'cats'
Щ щ	shch	as the 'shch' in 'fresh chips'
Ь ь		* 'soft sign' (see below)
Я я	ya	as in 'yard'
В в	v	as in 'van'
Е е	ye	as in 'yes'
	yö	as the 'yea' in 'yeam'
З з	z	as the 'ds' in 'suds'
К к	k	as in 'kit'
Н н	n	as in 'neat'
П п	p	as in 'pat'
Т т	t	as in 'tin'
Ф ф	f	as in 'five'
Ч ч	ch	as in 'chat'
Ъ ъ		* 'hard sign' (see below)
Э э	e	as in 'den'

* The letters ь and ъ never occur alone, but simply affect the pronunciation of the previous letter – ь makes the preceding sound soft (the consonant before it is pronounced as if there's a very short 'y' after it), while ъ makes the previous sound hard (it prevents it being pronounced as if there's a 'y' after it).

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.

Сайн байна уу? *sain bai-na uu?*
(literally: How are you?)

Fine. How are you?

Сайн. Та сайн *sain ta sain bai-na uu?*
байна уу?

What's new?

Сонин сайхан *so-nin sai-khan*
юу байна? *yu bai-na?*

Nothing really.

Тайван сайхан. *tai-van sai-khan*
(literally: It's peaceful.)

Goodbye.

Баяртай. *ba-yar-tai*

Yes. Тийм. *tiim*

No. Үгүй. *ü-güi*

Thanks. Баярлалаа. *ba-yar-la-laa*

Excuse me. Уучлаарай. *uuch-laa-rai*

I'm sorry, what did you say?

Уучлаарай, та юу гэж хэлсэн, бэ?
uuch-laa-rai ta yu gej khel-sen be?

What's your name?

Таны нэрийг хэн гэдэг вэ?
ta-ny ne-riig khén ge-deg ve?

My name is ...

Миний нэрийг ... гэдэг.
mi-nii ne-riig ... ge-deg

What country are you from?

Та аль улсаас ирсэн бэ?
ta a-li ul-saas ir-sen be?

I'm from ...

Би ... улсаас ирсэн.
bi ... ul-saas ir-sen

How old are you?

Та хэдэн настай вэ?
ta khe-den nas-tai ve?

I'm ... years old.

Би ... настай.
bi ... nas-tai

Are you married?

Та гэр бүлтэй юү?
ta ger bü-tei yü?

No, I'm not.

Үгүй, би гэр бүлгүй.
ü-güi bi ger bü-гүй

Yes, I'm married.

Тийм, би гэр бүлтэй.
tiim bi ger bü-tei

Do you have any children?

Та хүүхэдтэй юү?
ta khüü-hed-tei yü?

Can I take photographs?

Зураг авч болох уу?
zu-rag avch bo-lokh uu?

May I take your photograph?

Би таны зургийг авч болох уу?
bi ta-ny zur-giig avch bo-lokh uu?

The Herder's Domain

We'd like to see inside a herder's ger.

Бид малчны гэрт орж үзэх гэсэн юм.
bid malch-ny gert orj ü-zekh ge-sen yum

How long will it take to get there?

Тэнд хүрэхэд хир удах вэ?
tend khü-re-khed khir u-dakh ve?

Can we walk there?

Бид явган явж болох уу?
bid yav-gan yavj bo-lokh uu?

Please hold the dogs!

Нохой хогио!
nok-hoi kho-ri-oi!

We'd like to drink some airag.

Бид айраг уух гэсэн юм.
bid ai-rag uukh ge-sen yum

If you're visiting a family, especially in the country, having agreed that everybody's fine, you should proceed to asking about family members and livestock and only then to more general matters:

How's your family?

Танай гэр бүлийнхэн сайн уу?
ta-nai ger bü-iiin-hen sain uu?

I hope your animals are fattening up nicely.

Мал сүрэг тарган тавтай юү?
mal sü-reg tar-gan tav-tai yü?

Are you very busy?

Та ажил ихтэй байна уу?
ta a-jil ikh-tei bai-na uu?

I'm very busy.

Би тун завгүй байна.
bi tun zav-güi bai-na

cooking pot	тогоо	<i>to-goo</i>
cowdung box	араг	<i>a-rag</i>
door	хаалга	<i>khaal-ga</i>
felt material	эсгий	<i>es-gii</i>
felt roof cover	эсгий дээвэр	<i>es-gii dee-ver</i>
ger	гэр	<i>ger</i>
airag bag	хөхүүр	<i>khö-khüür</i>
smoke-hole	өрх	<i>örkh</i>
cover in a ger		
stove	зуух	<i>zuukh</i>
support post	багана	<i>ba-ga-na</i>
wooden frame	тооно	<i>too-no</i>
for flue in a ger		
wooden lattice	хана	<i>kha-na</i>
of a ger		

camel	тэмээ	<i>te-mee</i>
chicken	тахиа	<i>ta-khia</i>
cow	үнээ	<i>ü-nee</i>

donkey	илжиг	<i>il-jig</i>
enclosure	малын хашаа	<i>ma-lyn kha-shaa</i>
goat	ямаа	<i>ya-maa</i>
herding	мал аж ахуй	<i>mal aj ak-hui</i>
	(literally: cattle breeding)	
horse	морь	<i>mo-ri</i>
pig	гахай	<i>ga-khai</i>
reindeer	цаа буга	<i>tsaa bu-ga</i>
sheep	хонь	<i>kho-ni</i>
summer camp	зуслан	<i>zus-lan</i>
yak	сарлаг	<i>sar-lag</i>

DIRECTIONS

How can I get to ...?

... руу би яаж очих вэ?
... ruu bi yaj o-chikh ve?

Is it far?

Хир хол вэ?
khir khol ve?

Do you have a (town) map?

Танайд (хотын) зураг байна уу?
ta-naid (kho-tyн) zu-rag bai-na uu?

What ... is this?

Энэ ямар ... вэ? *e-ne ya-mar ... ve?*

square	
талбай	<i>tal-bai</i>
street	
гудамж	<i>gu-damj</i>
suburb	
дүүрэг	<i>düü-reg</i>
municipality	
хотын захиргаа	<i>kho-tyн za-khir-gaa</i>

SIGNS

Орох Хаалга	Entrance
Гарах Хаалга	Exit
Орж улолхгүй	No Entry
Гарч улолхгүй	No Exit
Эмэгтэйчүүдийн	Ladies
Эрэгтэйчүүдийн	Gentlemen
Хүнгүй	Vacant
Захиалгатай	Reserved
Касс	Cashier
Лавлах	Information
Шуудан	Post
Такси	Taxi
Хаалттай	Closed
Анхаар	Caution
Засвартай	Under Repair
Тамхи Татахыг	No Smoking
Хориглоно	
Зураг Авахыг	No Photography
Хориглоно	

EMERGENCIES

Help! Туслаарай! tus-laa-rai!
Stop! Зогс! zogs!

Call ...!

... дуудаарай! ... duu-daa-rai!

an ambulance

түргэн тусламж tür-gen tus-lamj

a doctor

эмч emch

the police

цагдаа tsag-daa

I'm ill.

Миний бие өвдөж байна.

mi-nii bi-ye öv-döj bai-na

Could you please take me to hospital?

Намайг эмнэлэгт хүргэж өгнө үү?

na-maig em-ne-legt khür-gej ög-nö üü?

Could you help me please?

Та надад туслана уу?

ta na-dad tsus-la-na uu?

I've lost my way.

Би төөрчихлөө.

bi töör-chikh-löö

I wish to contact my embassy.

Би элчин сайдын яамтайгаа холбоо

баримаар байна.

bi el-chin sai-diin yaam-tai-gaa khol-boo

ba-ri-maar bai-na

Where's the toilet?

Бие засах газар хаана байдаг вэ?

bi-ye za-sakh ga-zar khaa-na bai-dag ve?

north	хойд/умард	khoid/u-mard
south	урд/өмнө	urd/öm-nö
east	зүүн/дорно	züün/dor-no
west	баруун/өрнөд	ba-ruun/ör-nöd
behind/after	хойно/ард	khoi-no/ard
in front/before	өмнө/урд	öm-nö/urd
to the left	зүүн тийш	züün tiish
to the right	баруун тийш	ba-ruun tiish
straight ahead	чигээрээ урагшаа	chi-gee-ree u-rag-shaa

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES**Do you speak English?**

Та англиар ярьдаг уу?

ta an-gliar yair-dag uu?

Could you speak more slowly?

Та арай аажуухан ярина уу?

ta a-rai aa-juu-khan ya-ri-na uu?

Please point to the phrase in the book.

Та энэ хэллэгийг номон дээр зааж өгнө уу?

ta e-ne khel-le-giig no-mon deer zaaj ög-nö uu?

I understand.

Би ойлголоо.

bi oil-go-loo

I don't understand.

Би ойлгохгүй байна.

bi oil-gokh-güi bai-na

NUMBERS

0	тэг	teg
1	нэг	neg
2	хоёр	kho-yor
3	гурав	gu-rav
4	дөрөв	dö-röv
5	тав	tav
6	зургаа	zur-gaa
7	долоо	do-loo
8	найм	naim
9	ес	yös
10	арав	ar-av
11	арван нэг	ar-van neg
12	арван хоёр	ar-van kho-yor
13	арван гурав	ar-van gu-rav
14	арван дөрөв	ar-van dö-röv
15	арван тав	ar-van tav
16	арван зургаа	ar-van zur-gaa
17	арван долоо	ar-van do-loo
18	арван найм	ar-van naim
19	арван ес	ar-van yös
20	хорь	kho-ri
21	хорин нэг	kho-rin neg
22	хорин хоёр	kho-rin kho-yor
30	гуч	guch
40	дөч	döch
50	тавч	taiv
60	жар	jar
70	дал	dal
80	ная	naya
90	ер	yör
100	зуу	zuu
101	зуун нэг	zuun neg
1000	мянга	myang-ga
one million	сая	sa-ya

SHOPPING & SERVICES**Where's the nearest ...?**

Ойрхон ... хаана байнаг вэ?

oir-khon ... khaa-na bai-dag ve?

bank

банк bank

department store

их дэлгүүр ikh del-güür

hotel

эочид бүүдал zo-chid buu-dal

market

зах zakh

post office

шуудан shuu-dan

public bathhouse

нийтийн халуун nii-tiin kha-luun

усны газар us-ny ga-zar

When will it open/close?

Хэзээ (онгойх/хаах) вэ?

khe-zee on-(goikh/khaakh) ve?

I'd like to change some money.

Би мөнгө солих гэсэн юм.

bi möng-go so-likh ge-sen yum

I'd like to change some travellers cheques.

Би чек солих гэсэн юм.

bi chek so-likh ge-sen yum

What's the exchange rate?

Солих ханш хэд байна вэ?

so-likh khansh hed bai-na ve?

TRANSPORT**Where's the ... ?**

... хаана байдаг вэ?

... khaa-na bai-dag ve?

train station

галт тэрэгний galt te-re-ge-nii

буудал buud-al

bus station/stop

автобусны буудал av-to-bus-ny buu-dal

trolley-bus stop

троллейбусны trol-lei-bus-ny

буудал buu-dal

ticket office

тасалбаг түгээгүүр ta-sal-bag tu-gee-güür

How much is it to go to ...?

... хүрэхэд ямар үнэтэй вэ?

... hu-re-hed ya-mar ün-tei ve?



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Mongolian Phrasebook

Can I walk there?

Тийшээ явган очиж болох уу?

tii-shee yav-gan o-chij bo-lokh uu?

What times does ... leave/arrive?

... хэдэн цагт явдаг/ирдэг вэ?

... khe-den tsagt yav-dag/ir-deg ve?

the bus

автобус av-to-bus

the trolley-bus

троллейбус trol-lei-bus

the train

галт тэрэг galt te-reg

the plane

нисэх онгоц ni-seh on-gots

Does this bus go to ...?

Энэ автобус ... руу явдаг уу?

e-ne av-to-bus ... ruu yav-dag uu?

Which bus goes to ...?

... руу ямар автобус явдаг вэ?

... ruu ya-mar av-to-bus yav-dag ve?

Can you tell me when we get to ...?

Бид хэзээ ... хүрэхийг хэлж өгнө үү?

bid khe-zee ... khu-re-hiig helj ög-nö uu?

I want to get off!

Би буумаар байна!

bi buu-maar bai-na!

Is this seat taken?

Энэ суудал хүнтэй юү?

e-ne suu-dal khün-tei yüü?

What's this station called?

Энэ ямар нэртэй буудал вэ?

e-ne ya-mar ner-tei buu-dal ve?

What's the next station??

Дараагийн буудал ямар нэртэй буудал вэ?

da-raa-giin buu-dal ya-mar ner-tei buu-dal ve?

Glossary

See p46 in the Food & Drink chapter for some useful words and phrases dealing with food and dining. See the Language chapter (p293) for other useful words and phrases.

agui – cave or grotto
aimag – a province/state within Mongolia
am – mouth, but often used as a term for canyon
aral – island
arkhi – the common word to describe home-made vodka
ashkhana – restaurant (Kazakh)

baatar – hero
bag – village; a subdivision of a *sum*
bag – little
balbal – stone figures believed to be Turkic grave markers; known as *khun chuluu* (man stones) in Mongolian
baruun – west
bayan – rich
bodhisattva – Tibetan-Buddhist term; applies to a being that has voluntarily chosen not to take the step to nirvana in order to save the souls of those on earth
Bogd Gegeen – the hereditary line of reincarnated Buddhist leaders of Mongolia, which started with Zanabazar; the third-highest leader in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy; also known as *Jebtzun Damba*
Bogd Khaan (Holy King) – title given to the Eighth Bogd Gegeen (1869–1924)
bökh – wrestling
bugan chuluu (deer stones) – upright grave markers from the Bronze and Iron ages, on which are carved stylised images of deer
bulag – natural spring
Buriat – ethnic minority living along the northern frontier of Mongolia, mostly in Khentii and Dornod

chuluu – rock; rock formation

davaa – mountain pass
deer stones – see *bugan chuluu*
del/deel – the all-purpose, traditional coat or dress worn by men and women
delger – richness, plenty
delgüür – a shop
dombra – two-stringed lute (Kazakh)
dorje – thunderbolt symbol, used in Tibetan Buddhist ritual
dorno – east
dov – hill
dund – middle

els – sand; sand dunes
erdene – precious

Furgon – Russian-made 11-seater minivan

gegeen – saint; saintlike person
ger – traditional circular felt yurt
gol – river
gov – desert
guanz – canteen or cheap restaurant
gudamj – street

hard seat – the common term to describe the standard of the 2nd-class train carriage

ikh – big
ikh delgüür – department store
Inner Mongolia – a separate province within China
irbis – snow leopard

Jebtzun Damba – see *Bogd Gegeen*

Kazakh – ethnic minority, mostly living in western Mongolia
khaan – emperor; great *khan*
khad – rock
khagan – *khaan*; generally used for leaders during the Turkic (pre-Mongol) period
khaganate – Turkic (pre-Mongol) empire
khagas – half-size
Khalkh – the major ethnic group living in Mongolia
khan – king or chief
khar – black
khashaa – fenced-in *ger*, often found in suburbs
kherem – wall
khetsuu – difficult/hard
khiid – Buddhist monastery
khödöö – countryside
khoid – north
khöndii – valley
khoro – district or subdistrict
khot – city
khulan – wild ass
khun chuluu (man stones) – see *balbal*
khuree – originally used to describe a ‘camp’, it is now also in usage as ‘monastery’
khuriltai – nomadic congress during the Mongol era
khürkhrée – waterfall
khutukhtu – reincarnated lama, or living god
kino – cinema

lama – Tibetan Buddhist monk or priest
Lamaism – an outdated term, and now properly known as Vajramana, or Tibetan Buddhism
Living Buddha – common term for reincarnations of Buddha; Buddhist spiritual leader in Mongolia (see *Bogd Gegeen*)
loovuuz – fox-fur hat

malchin – herder
man stones – see *balbal*
maral – Asiatic red deer
mod – tree
morin khuur – horse-head fiddle
mörön – another word for river, usually a wide river
MPRP – Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party

naadam – games; traditional festival with archery, horse racing and wrestling
nairamdal – friendship
nuruu – mountain range
nuur – lake

ömnö – south
ordon – palace
örgön chölöö – avenue
Outer Mongolia – northern Mongolia during Manchu rule (the term is not currently used to describe Mongolia)
ovoo – a shamanistic collection of stones, wood or other offerings to the gods, usually found in high places

rashaan – mineral springs

shaykhana – tea house (Kazakh)
soft seat – the common term to describe the standard of the 1st-class train carriage
soyombo – the national symbol
stupa – a Buddhist religious monument composed of a solid hemisphere topped by a spire, containing relics of the Buddha; also known as a pagoda, or *suvgar* in Mongolian

sum – a district; the administrative unit below an *aimag*
süm – Buddhist temple
suvgar – see *stupa*

taiga – subarctic coniferous evergreen forests (Russian)
takhi – the Mongolian wild horse; also known as Przewalski’s horse
tal – steppe
talbai – square
thangka – scroll painting; a rectangular Tibetan Buddhist painting on cloth, often seen in monasteries
tögrög – the unit of currency in Mongolia
töv – central
Tsagaan Sar – ‘white moon’ or ‘white month’; a festival to celebrate the Mongolian New Year (start of the lunar year)
tsainii gazar – tea house/café
tsam – lama dances; performed by monks wearing masks during religious ceremonies
tsas – snow
tsuivan gazar – noodle stall
tuuts – kiosk selling imported foodstuffs

ulaan – red
urtynduu – traditional singing style
us – water
uul – mountain
uurga – traditional wooden lasso used by nomads

yavakh – depart
yurt – the Russian word for *ger*

zakh – market
zochid budal – hotel
zud – a particularly bad winter, involving a huge loss of livestock
zun – summer
zuu – one hundred
ziüü – needle
zuun – century
ziün – east

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