

# Ulaanbaatar

## Улаанбаатар



If Mongolia's yin is its pristine countryside, then Ulaanbaatar (UB) conforms nicely to its yang. An enormous city of pulsating commerce, heavy traffic, sinful nightlife and bohemian counter-culture, the Mongolian capital stirs as much shock as it does excitement.

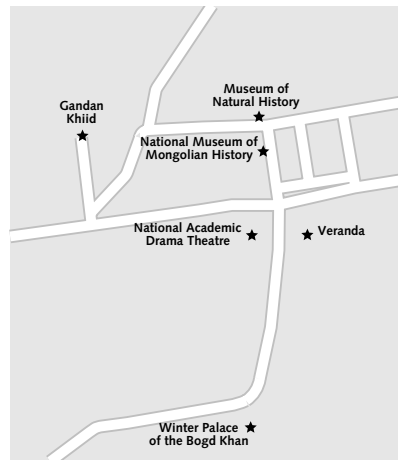
UB is a cauldron of concrete and dirt. New buildings are thrown up on any available patch of ground, while Humvees battle Landcruisers and yellow taxis for right of way on pot-holed boulevards. On the high street, tourists and new-moneyed Mongols look for bargains in European fashion shops and Mongolian cashmere boutiques.

Between these chaotic scenes are islands of serenity – quiet monastery courtyards, public squares and the odd beer patio. The river, the Tuul Gol, offers a cool respite to the south while the four holy mountains surrounding the city provide its backdrop. Ever-expanding ger (yurt) suburbs still surround the city, offering a glimpse back to before Soviet urban planning.

As Mongolia's cultural, political, economic and social hub, Ulaanbaatar is the logical base for excursions into the countryside. As you're planning your plunge take the time to explore its excellent sights and museums, fill up at some great restaurants and soak in the eclectic vibe. This ever-changing city may be the biggest surprise of your Mongolian adventure.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Walk the prayer circuit around **Gandan Khiid** (p73), the country's largest monastery
- Wonder at the eccentric collection of animals, curios and artefacts at the **Winter Palace of the Bogd Khan** (p75)
- Take in a performance of traditional dance, song, horse-head fiddles and contortionists at the **National Academic Drama Theatre** (p92)
- Get lost in the rambling hallways of the **Museum of Natural History** (p69) until you at last come face to face with the extraordinary dinosaur collection
- Enjoy a bottle of wine at **Veranda** (p88) while overlooking the Chojin Lama Temple Museum
- Weave through Mongolia's ancient past at the **National Museum of Mongolian History** (p69)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 011

■ POPULATION: ONE MILLION

■ AREA: 1368 SQ KM

### HISTORY

The first recorded capital city of the recent Mongolian empire was created in 1639. It was called Örgöö and was originally located at the monastery of Da Khuree, some 420km from Ulaanbaatar in Arkhangai aimag (province). The monastery was the residence of five-year-old Zanabazar who, at the time, had been proclaimed the head of Buddhism in Mongolia. Because it consisted of felt tents, the 'city' was easily transported when the grass went dry. Some 25 movements were recorded along the Orkhon, Selenge and Tuul Gols (rivers). Throughout such movement, the city was given some fairly unexciting official and unofficial names, including Khuree (Camp) in 1706.

In 1778 Khuree was erected at its present location (GPS: N47° 55.056', E106° 55.007') and called the City of Felt. Later, the city became known as Ikh Khuree (Great Camp), and was under the rule of the Bogd Gegeen, or Living Buddha. The Manchus, however, used Uliastai as the administrative capital of Outer Mongolia.

In 1911 when Mongolia first proclaimed its independence from China, the city became the capital of Outer Mongolia and was renamed Niislel Khuree (Capital Camp). In 1918 it was invaded by the Chinese and three years later by the Russians.

Finally, in 1924 the city was renamed Ulaanbaatar (Red Hero), in honour of the communist triumph, and declared the official capital of an 'independent' Mongolia (independent from China, not from the Soviet Union). The *khangard* (garuda), symbolising courage and honesty, was declared the city's official symbol. In 1933 Ulaanbaatar gained autonomy and separated from the surrounding Töv aimag.

From the 1930s, the Soviets built the city in typical Russian style: lots of ugly apartment blocks, large brightly coloured theatres and cavernous government buildings. Tragically, the Soviets also destroyed many old Russian buildings as well as Mongolian monasteries and temples. Today the city booms with new private construction projects although a comprehensive infrastructure plan has been slow to implement. It has also enjoyed cultural resurgence with lots of museums, galleries, theatre performances and clubs bringing out the best in traditional Mongolian culture.

### ORIENTATION

Most of the city spreads from east to west along the main road, Enkh Taivny Örgön Chölöö, also known as Peace Ave. At the centre is Sükhbaatar Sq, often simply known as 'the Square' (*talbai*), which is just north of Peace Ave. Sprawling suburbia is limited by the four majestic mountains that surround the city: Bayanzürkh, Chingeltei, Songino Khaikhan and Bogdkhan. The river to the south, the Tuul Gol, also somewhat limits the growth of suburban expansion.

Around the Square are the Central Post Office (CPO) and the Palace of Culture, and a couple of blocks west of the Square is the State Department Store.

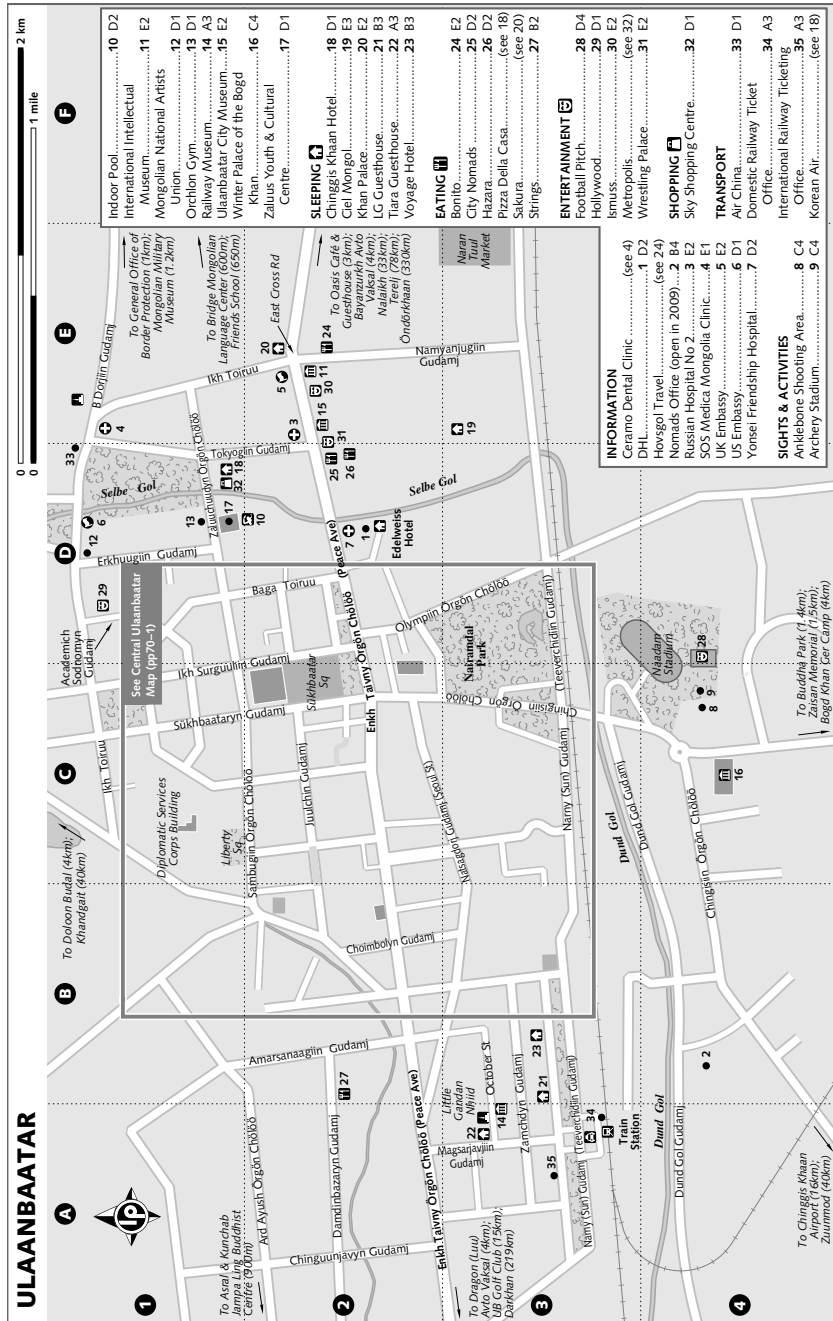
The city is divided into six major districts, but there's a multitude of subdistricts and microdistricts. Mongolians rarely use street names and numbers, so tracking down an address can be difficult. A typical address might be something like: Microdistrict 14, Building 3, Flat 27. The problems with this are numerous – you are unlikely to know which microdistrict it refers to, many buildings are not numbered or signed, and most street signs are in Mongolian Cyrillic. This is why most locals will give you an unofficial description, such as 'Door 67, building 33, last door of a white-and-red building, behind the Drama Theatre'. To find your way around Ulaanbaatar, a good map, phrasebook and sense of direction are vital. Because of the confusing state of affairs, small maps are usually on the back of business cards.

Ulaanbaatar is another reason to get a local SIM card for your phone; you'll use it frequently to call places for directions when you get lost. (While it helps to speak basic Mongolian, many places that travellers are likely to call will have an English speaker.) As street addresses are not always obvious, it's best to navigate using the map in this book.

The train station is southwest of the centre. Bus 4 runs from here to Sükhbaatar Sq. The airport is 18km southwest of the city; to get to Sükhbaatar Sq take bus 11 or 22.

### Maps

There are several maps available of Ulaanbaatar; the best is the 1:10,000 *Ulaanbaatar City Map* (T5500), updated annually. On the back is a 1:200,000 map of the area around Ulaanbaatar. Maps can be found in bookshops and hotels.



The best place to obtain maps is the **Cartography Co Map Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9115 6023; Ikh Toiruu; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat year-round, 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep) on Ikh Toiruu, near the Elba Electronics shop. You can also buy good topographic maps of Mongolia here.

A more central map shop is the **Gazaryn Zurag Map Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 147, 9918 9182; Cho-Burt Bldg, Seoul St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat). It produces its own maps, some of which are cheaper than those of Cartography Co, but the selection is much smaller and it doesn't have topo maps.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

English-language bookshops in Mongolia are small and limited. Besides the following shops, you could try poking around the newspaper kiosk in the CPO or the State Department Store (3rd and 5th floors).

**Books in English** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9920 3360; Peace Ave; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun) Small bookshop, located next to the Za Internet Café.

**Librairie Papillon** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 331 859; Ikh Surguuljin Gudamj; ☎ 11am-8pm) Ulaanbaatar's finest bookshop, although almost everything is in French.

**Nomin Ikh Delgur** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 900; Baga Toiruu east; ☎ 10am-8pm) This place is well-stocked in Mongolian-language books and has a few English titles on the 2nd floor.

**Xanadu** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 748, 311 045; Marco Polo Bldg; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Offers the best selection of fiction and nonfiction books in English, plus titles about Mongolia. It also carries a selection of Lonely Planet titles.

### Emergency

It might take a few minutes to get hold of an English speaker for these numbers.

**Emergency aid/ambulance** (☎ 103)

**Fire** (☎ 101)

**Police emergency** (☎ 102)

**Robbery Unit** (☎ 318 783)

### Internet Access

In Ulaanbaatar an internet café (ИНТЭРНЭТ Кафе) is never more than a block or two away, just look for the signs, which are usually in English. Hourly rates are reasonable at about T400 to T800; but double that price at hotel business centres. Connections are generally good. You can scan photos in many places for around T200.

**Internet café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 7010 2486; Peace Ave; per hr T600; ☎ 24hr) Located inside the CPO.

### WI-FI ACCESS

There are a growing number of wireless hotspots in Ulaanbaatar. Cafés and restaurants that offer free (sometimes unstable) wi-fi include the Grand Khaan Irish Pub (p89), Silk Road (p88), City Café (p87) and Narya Café (p89). The best connection is at Michele's French Bakery (p89).

**Internet Center** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 327 438; Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj) Next to the Orange coffee shop.

**Internet Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 512; Tserendorjiin Gudamj 65; per hr T800; ☎ 9am-2am) One of the largest internet cafés with at least 35 computers.

**Orchuulin Tovchuu** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 310 902; Baga Toiruu north; per hr T400; ☎ 9am-11pm) On the north-east bend of Baga Toiruu.

**Za Internet Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 801; Peace Ave 62; per hr T600; ☎ 24hr) Located 100m west of the State Department Store.

### Laundry

Almost all of the hotels in Ulaanbaatar offer a laundry service for between T500 and T1500 per kilogram, but they may not advertise it – so just ask. If you can be bothered, it's not difficult to do some laundry yourself – the markets and shops sell small packets of detergent and bleach.

**Metro Express** (☎ 470 789, 9919 4234) has 10 branches scattered across the city, including one next to the Dalai Eej supermarket (Map pp70-1). A load of laundry costs T5500 and turn-around time is about four hours.

### Left Luggage

Most hotels and guesthouses can store luggage while you are off getting lost in the Gobi. There is usually no fee if you've stayed a few nights.

### Libraries

The **National Library of Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 396; Chingisjin Orgon Chölöö; ☎ 9am-8pm) has a vast number of English-language books and documents; the trouble is accessing it. Texts are kept in storage and you need to fill out a small slip of paper (*shefer*) to request the book you want. If you don't have a library card (T4000) you'll need to leave some ID for a deposit. Nearly all texts in English are of the Mongolia genre.

The **American Center for Mongolian Studies** (Америкийн Монгол Судлалын Төв; Map pp70-1; ☎ 350 486; www.mongoliacenter.org; Mongolian National University, Bldg 5, Room 304, Baga Toiruu; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) has a small library of books on Mongolia. In summer, the centre also hosts weekly lectures by Western academics, authors and other people of interest (check the *UB Post* for events).

## Media

Democracy has brought an explosion of Mongolian-language newspapers, with controversies and scandals forming popular topics. Ulaanbaatar's two English-language weekly newspapers, *Mongol Messenger* and (the better) *UB Post*, are well worth picking up for local news and entertainment information.

## Medical Services

While Ulaanbaatar may be a fairly healthy city, its hospitals are abysmal and best avoided. The only really reliable place is SOS (listed following) but full-blown emergencies are sent to Seoul or Beijing. Pharmacies (*aptek*; Аптек) are common in Ulaanbaatar, stocking Mongolian, Russian, Chinese and Korean medicine. Check expiry dates carefully.

**Russian Hospital No 2** (Map p64; ☎ 450 129, 450 230; cnr Peace Ave & Tokyogin Gudamj) This is the best Mongolian hospital in town, though it's hardly the place you'd want to visit for a critical ailment. It's 200m west of the British embassy. Consultations cost US\$10 to US\$20.

**SOS Medica Mongolia Clinic** (Map p64; ☎ 464 325; 4a Bldg, Big Ring Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) This clinic has a staff of Western doctors on call 24 hours (after hours call ☎ 9911 0335). Its services don't come cheap (examinations start from around US\$195), but it's the best place to go in an emergency.

**Yonsei Friendship Hospital** (Map p64; ☎ 310 945; Peace Ave; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) This South Korean-sponsored clinic is fairly reliable and reasonably priced. English-speaking doctors are sometimes on hand and the prices are very reasonable (less than T5000 for a consultation). The hospital is located close to the Selbe Gol bridge.

The best place for dental work is at **Ceramo Dental Clinic** (Map p64; ☎ 464 330, 9666 0670) in the same building as SOS Medica Mongolia Clinic. An optometrist is located on the 1st floor of the State Department Store.

## Money

You won't have to go far to change cash or travellers cheques, or get a cash advance

on your credit card. Many banks in central Ulaanbaatar even offer 24-hour services. The bigger hotels also offer exchange services for their guests. Avoid changing money with street dealers at the markets: the rate is only slightly better than at official moneychangers and you run the risk of being cheated.

ATMs are popping up in many places including the lobbies of the Ulaanbaatar, Bayangol and Chinggis Khaan hotels, as well as department stores and supermarkets.

Both Golomt and Trade & Development Bank (T&D Bank) will allow you to receive money wired from abroad. It will cost the sender US\$50 to wire any amount of money; there is no charge for receiving cash. For general information on money, see p257.

**Golomt Bank** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 436; ☎ 24hr) Around-the-clock banking services. Changing travellers cheques into tögrög carries a fee of 1.5%. You can get a cash advance with no commission on Visa or MasterCard. There are six branches around town, including Seoul St and just south of the corner of Juulchin Gudamj on Baga Toiruu.

**Khan Bank** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 456 154; cnr Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö & Baga Toiruu; ☎ 24hr)  
**Mongol Shuudan Bank** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 310 103; Kholboochiin Gudamj 4; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri)  
**State Department Store** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave 44) Also has exchange booths.

**Trade & Development Bank** (T&D Bank; Map pp70-1; ☎ 327 095; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Travellers cheques are changed into tögrög with a 1% fee or into US dollars with a 2% fee. For foreigners, the place to do business is on the 2nd floor of the main branch on the corner of Juulchin Gudamj and Baga Toiruu. Here you also get a cash advance on your credit card; MasterCard carries a 4% commission, Amex and Visa are both commission-free. The bank will also replace lost Amex travellers cheques. A second branch is located on Peace Ave, opposite the Ulaanbaatar Hotel.

**Valiut Ariljaa** (Map pp70-1; Baga Toiruu west ☎ 8.30am-9pm) There are several exchange offices on this square, known by locals as Ard Kino. The exchange offices here have some of the best rates in town.

## Permits

If you are travelling to border areas such as Altai Tavan Bogd National Park in Bayan-Ölgii, the **General Office of Border Protection** (off Map p64; ☎ 286 788, 454 142; Border Defence Bldg; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), in the east of the city, is the place to come for permits. Permits are free but you must send a Mongolian on your behalf to apply. The office requires a passport photocopy and a map showing your route. The office is in a

grey building just west of the Mongolian Military Museum.

## Police

The police can be found on Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö or on Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj but, as in the rest of the country, don't expect much assistance.

## Post

**Central Post Office** (CPO, Töv Shuudangiin Salbar; Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 421; cnr Peace Ave & Sükhbaataryn Gudamj; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun) Located near the southwest corner of Sükhbaatar Sq. As you enter the main hall, the oversize-package desk is on the left and the Telecom office is to the right. The Postal Counter Hall is the place to post mail and check poste restante (counter No 1; letters are free but there's a T300 charge to pick up a package, and you'll need to show your passport). EMS express (priority) mail can also be sent from here. There is also a good range of postcards, small booklets about Mongolia in English and local newspapers for sale. Note that while open, most services are nonexistent on Sunday. DHL and FedEx are more reliable than anything the CPO can offer.

**DHL** (Map p64; ☎ 310 919; www.dhl.mn; Peace Ave 15a; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Near the Edelweiss Hotel.

**FedEx** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 092; fedex@tuushin.mn; Amaryn Gudamj 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) In front of the Tuushin Hotel. A 500g letter to Australia is US\$36; to the UK and USA it is US\$45.

## Telephone & Fax

For local calls, you can use the phone at your hotel, often for free. Other hotels, including those with business centres, and some of the street stalls with telephones charge T100 for a call to a landline (six digits) or a mobile number (eight digits). You can also make local calls from the CPO or at any number of street-side peddlers whose entire business is selling phone calls on ubiquitous portable white phones.

Private, inexpensive international phone offices (*Olon Ulsiin Yariin*) are sometimes tucked into corners of shops, restaurants or computer-game centres. One is located at Peace Ave 62, below the Za Internet Café (Map pp70-1). Calls are dirt cheap (ie T50 per minute to the US or T100 per minute to Europe). Many internet cafés are equipped with headsets and webcams for easy Skype calls.

International phone calls from the CPO are more laborious and more expensive, but it's open all night.

Most mid- to top-range hotels have a fax that can be used by guests for about T1500 to T2000 per page. The CPO offers a less user-friendly service, with cheaper rates. Hotels charge around T500 to receive a fax on your behalf.

## Toilets

Public toilets can be found on Seoul St by the Natsagdorj Library and opposite California restaurant.

## Tourist Information

**Discovery Mongolia Information Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 371; Naryn Gudamj; ☎ 10am-7pm) Sells maps and books and provides general tourist info.

**Tourist Information Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 423, 311 409; cnr Peace Ave & Sükhbaataryn Gudamj; ☎ 9am-8pm) Located in the back hall of the CPO, this info desk has an English-speaking staff that can give general info on city tours and nationwide travel. The desk also sells books and maps about Mongolia. It has branches at the airport and the train station.

## Travel Agencies

Staff at backpacker guesthouses can help with visa registration and train tickets. All the guesthouses mentioned in this book offer reliable help. For a small fee, some guesthouses even help visitors staying at other hotels.

The Russian embassy usually refers travellers to **Legend Tour** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 315 158, 9984 2999; www.legendtour.ru; Seoul St, Sant Asar Trading Centre; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) for visa help. Some travellers have given some negative feedback about this operation, but it may be your only choice if you want that elusive Russian visa. Make sure you are clear on the full itinerary and any additional costs.

The following agencies are good for organising air tickets. For details of local agencies offering tours either within or outside of Ulaanbaatar, see p80.

**Air Market** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 366 060, 9927 9114; www.air-market.net; cnr Peace Ave & Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; ☎ 9am-8pm)

**Air Network** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 222; airnetwork@magicnet.mn; Baga Toiruu west; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun)

**Air Trans** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 310 061, 313 131; airtrans@magicnet.mn; cnr Sükhbaataryn Gudamj & Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Very reliable air-ticketing agency.

**Silk Road Network** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 405; silkroad@mongolnet.mn; Peace Ave, east side of State Department Store; ☎ 10am-8pm)

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Ulaanbaatar is a fairly carefree and easygoing city and it's unlikely you'll experience any problems but there are a few concerns to keep in mind, chief among them are pickpockets and dangerous traffic.

### Theft

Pickpockets and bag slashers are a recent and growing problem, although theft is seldom violent against foreigners, just opportunistic. One guesthouse owner reported that 5% of his guests are 'picked' while in Ulaanbaatar.

Crowded places are the trouble spots: getting onto a bus or getting held up in human traffic at the Naran Tuul market. The worst time is around Naadam Festival when pickpockets lurk around the Square and stadium – keep close watch of your camera. Beware of pickpockets who masquerade as coin sellers.

Pickpockets often work in teams; two or three will block your path and push from the front while another dives a hand into your pockets. During winter, the pockets of bulging coats are popular targets.

At Gandan Khiid, unsuspecting tourists, mesmerised by enchanting ceremonies, have been relieved of their money and passports. The same goes for foreigners engrossed in computer screens at internet cafés. When possible, leave valuables in the safe in your hotel. If you must take valuables on the street, use a money belt, and on public transport carry your bag in front of you. You can even get a temporary safe-deposit box at one of the 24-hour Golomt Banks.

### Violent Crime

Violent crime and muggings most often occur in the darkened alleys, courtyards and ger districts that lie off the well-lit boulevards. Avoid these areas after dark. Foreigners should use an official taxi – as opposed to a private vehicle – for lifts around town late at night.

Be careful when leaving nightclubs in Ulaanbaatar, where alcohol and comparatively rich foreigners are a potentially vulnerable mixture. Try to leave in a group rather than alone.

### Alcoholism

Alcoholism is becoming less of a problem these days as beer rapidly replaces vodka as the local beverage of choice. You'll still encounter drunks in and around Ulaanbaatar, especially around Naadam time, but they are usually more an-

noying than dangerous. Be sensible in bars and nightclubs; you're only asking for trouble if you flash around a lot of money or get into arguments about the virtues or otherwise of Chinggis Khaan or other issues of sensitivity.

### Queues

It could be the warrior-like bloodlines from Chinggis Khaan, a penchant for wrestling or habits from the communist days where demand always exceeded supply, but Mongolians rarely queue – they bustle, huddle and scramble. You will often need to sharpen your elbows, learn some appropriately argumentative phrases in Mongolian, and plough headfirst through the throng. Being polite won't really help, nor will getting angry.

### Traffic

Probably the most dangerous thing you can do in Ulaanbaatar is cross the street. Pedestrian rights are zilch so be careful when stepping off the curb. Drivers have a habit of speeding up when pedestrians are in the street – they are not really trying to kill you, it's their way of warning you to look out. Be careful even when the traffic lights are in your favour. A particularly dangerous crossing is right in front of the State Department Store.

### Other Annoyances

Virtually no stairways in the whole country have lights, so carrying a torch (flashlight) is a good idea, even during the day. Hot-water shortages and blackouts are common throughout the year.

Most offices have security guards in the lobby checking the ID cards of everyone who enters and leaves the buildings – it can sometimes be a nightmare getting past them. Police can also be unhelpful, see p254.

The number of street children and beggars in Ulaanbaatar has noticeably decreased in recent years but there are still a few around. While it is better not to give anything as this just encourages them to stay on the street, handing out food and drinks is better than money.

### SIGHTS

Most sights are located within a 15-minute walk from Sükhbaatar Sq. The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khan and the Zaisan Memorial are a short bus ride south of the city. Gandan Khiid is about 2km to the northwest.

## Museums

### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MONGOLIAN HISTORY

МОНГОЛЫН ТҮҮХИЙН ҮНДЭСНИЙ МУЗЕЙ

Still sometimes referred to by its previous name, the Revolutionary Museum, this **Mongolian history museum** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 325 656; cnr Juulchin Gudamj & Sükhbaatarын Gudamj; admission T2500, photos T5000; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) is an Ulaanbaatar highlight.

The recently renovated 1st floor has some interesting exhibits on Stone Age sites in Mongolia, as well as petroglyphs, deer stones (stone sculptures of reindeer and other animals) and burial sites from the Hun and Uighur eras.

The 2nd floor houses an outstanding collection of costumes, hats and jewellery, representing most of Mongolia's ethnic groups. Take a gander as some of the elaborate silverwork of the Dariganga minority or the outrageous headgear worn by Khalkh Mongols. Some of the outfits contain 20kg to 25kg of silver ornamentation!

The 3rd floor is a must-see for fans of the Mongol horde. The collection includes real examples of 12th-century Mongol armour, and correspondence between Pope Innocent IV and Guyuk Khaan. Written in Latin and Persian and dated 13 November 1246, it bears the khaan's seal. The centrepiece is an enormous model of ancient Karakorum, which is quite astonishing to see if you've already been to the site of Karakorum, of which almost nothing remains. There is also a display of traditional Mongolian culture with, among other things, a furnished ger, traditional farming and domestic implements, saddles and musical instruments. One hall features early-20th-century history; look out for the very colourful Mongolian dollars, the first currency of the modern republic.

### ZANABAZAR MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

ЗАНАБАЗАРЫН УРАН ЗУРГИЙН МУЗЕЙ

This **fine arts museum** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 326 060; Juulchin Gudamj; adult/student T2500/1000; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Apr) has a superb collection of paintings, carvings and sculptures, including many by the revered sculptor and artist Zanabazar. It also contains other rare, and sometimes old, religious exhibits such as scroll *thangka* (paintings) and Buddhist statues, representing the best display of its kind in Mongolia. A bonus is that most

of the exhibit captions in the museum are in English.

The second room contains some fine examples of the sculptor's work including five Dhyani, or Contemplation, Buddhas (cast in 1683) and Tara in her 21 manifestations.

Also worth checking out are the wonderful *tsam* masks (worn by monks during religious ceremonies) and the intricate paintings, *One Day in Mongolia* and the *Airag Feast*, by renowned artist B Sharav. These depict almost every aspect of nomadic life.

Worthy of a visit in itself, the **Red Ger Art Gallery** (☎ 323 986) on the 1st floor showcases modern artwork by Mongolia's top contemporary painters. English-speaking guides are available. From the gallery, continue towards to the back of the building to find two more halls, one featuring prints and the second containing folk art.

The building itself carries some historical value. It was built in 1906 and for many years served as Ulaanbaatar's biggest department store. Shortly after the 1921 Communist Revolution, Soviet Red Army troops were stationed here.

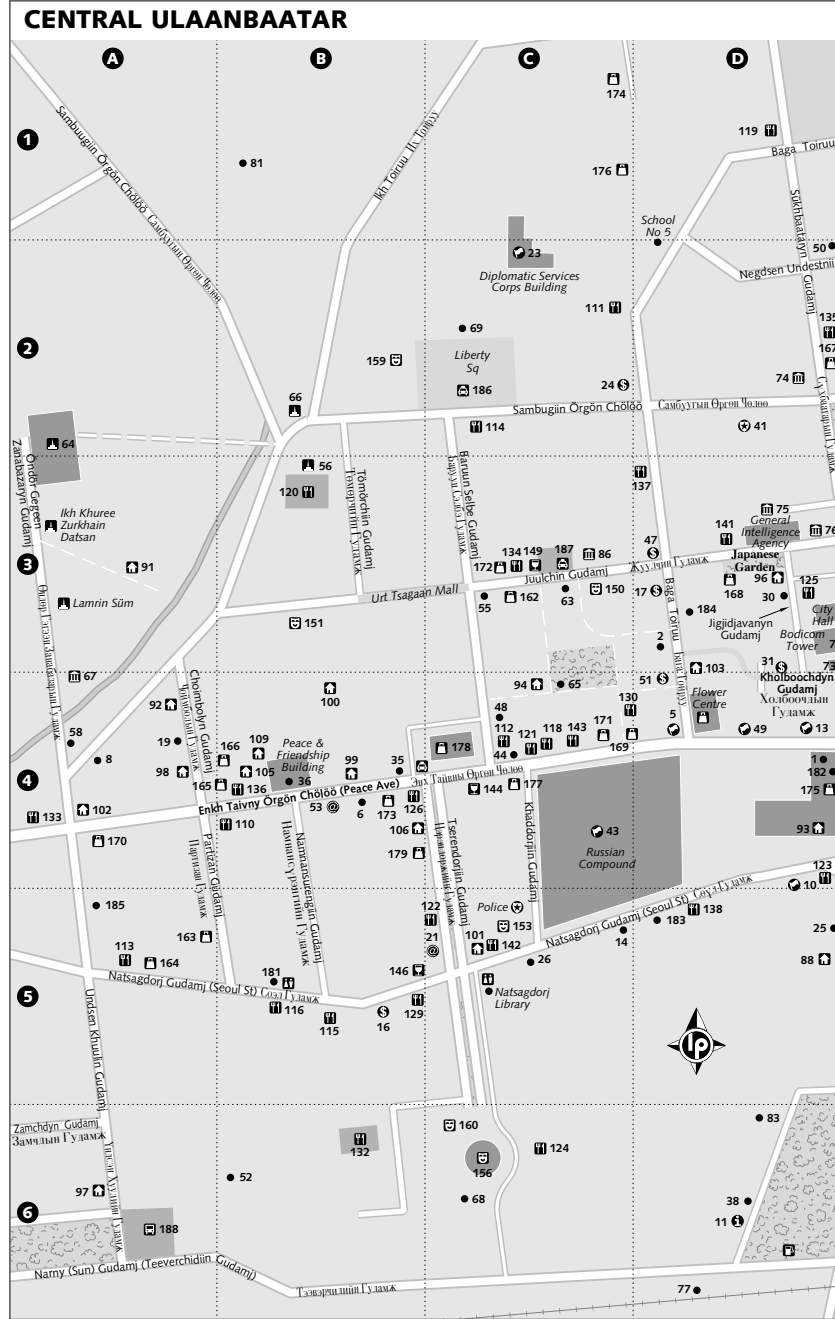
### MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

БАЙГАЛИЙН ТҮҮХИЙН МУЗЕЙ

This **natural history museum** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 716; cnr Sükhbaatarын Gudamj & Sambugin Örgön Chölöö; adult/student T2500/1000, photos T5000, video T10,000, photos of dinosaur skeletons extra T5000; ☎ 10am-5.30pm, closed Mon & Tue mid-Sep-mid-May) is a serious throwback to the Soviet era. It has exhibits featuring Mongolia's geography, flora and fauna, including the requisite section with stuffed and embalmed animals, birds and even fish. The general impression, however, is that you've stumbled into the warehouse of a long-deceased taxidermist, rather than into a serious scientific exhibition. Some of the animals have been fixed with puzzling expressions, as if they remain perplexed as to how they ended up in such an unfortunate state. In any case, budding geologists may appreciate the generally stoic **meteorites**.

The most impressive section is the Palaeontology Hall and its array of complete **dinosaur skeletons**, including a 3m-tall, 5-tonne, flesh-eating tarbosaurus. For a bird's-eye view, clamber up the stairs outside the hall to a gallery on the 3rd floor.

The gallery that is next door to the hall is full of interesting knick-knacks, such as



INFORMATION	
Active Mongolia.....	(see 175)
Air Market.....	1 D4
Air Network.....	2 D3
Air Trans.....	3 E2
American Center for Mongolian Studies.....	4 F1
Austrian Consulate.....	5 D4
Books In English.....	6 B4
Canadian Consulate.....	7 D3
Cartography Co Map Shop.....	8 A4
Chinese Embassy.....	9 F2
Danish Consulate.....	10 D4
Discovery Mongolia Information Centre.....	11 D6
FedEx.....	12 F3
French Embassy.....	13 D4
Gazaryn Zurag Map Shop.....	14 C5
German Embassy.....	15 E1
Golomt Bank.....	16 B5
Golomt Bank.....	17 D3
Happy Camel.....	(see 118)
Institute of International Studies.....	18 E2
International Language Centre.....	19 A4
International Phone Office.....	(see 53)
Internet Café.....	(see 42)
Internet Center.....	20 E2
Internet Centre.....	21 C5
Japanese Embassy.....	22 F4
Juulchin.....	(see 87)
Kazakhstan Embassy.....	23 C2
Khan Bank.....	24 C2
Khövsgöl Lodge Company.....	25 D5
Labour Registration Department.....	(see 41)
Legend Tour.....	26 C5
Librairie Papillon.....	27 E2
Maginet.....	(see 33)
Metro Express.....	(see 132)
Ministry of Enlightenment.....	28 F3
Ministry of External Relations.....	29 F4
Ministry of Nature & Environment.....	(see 28)
Mongol Messenger.....	30 D3
Mongol Shuudan Bank.....	31 D3
Mongolia Expeditions.....	32 E4
National Information & Technology Park.....	33 F2
National Library of Mongolia.....	34 E4
Nomadic Expeditions.....	35 B4
Nomadic Journeys.....	(see 167)
Nomads.....	36 B4
Nomin Ikh Delgur.....	37 F2
Office of Immigration, Naturalization & Foreign Citizens (INFC).....	38 D6
Orchuulin Tovchuu.....	39 E1
Police.....	40 E2
Police Headquarters.....	41 D2
Post Office Central.....	42 E4
Radiant Sky.....	(see 99)
Russian Embassy.....	43 C4
Samar Magic Tours.....	(see 121)
Silk Road Network.....	44 C4
South Korean Embassy.....	45 F4
Telecom Office.....	(see 42)
Tourist Information Centre.....	(see 42)
Trade & Development Bank.....	46 F4
Trade & Development Bank.....	47 D3
Tseren Tours.....	48 C4
Tsolmon Travel.....	(see 175)
Turkish Embassy.....	49 D4
UN Development Program.....	50 D2
Valiut Ariljaa (Ard Kino).....	51 D4
Wind of Mongolia.....	52 B6

Continued on p72

<i>Continued from p71</i>			
Xanadu.....(see 131)		Kharaa Hotel.....	98 A4
Za Internet Café.....	53 B4	Khongor Guest House.....	99 B4
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>			
0 Kilometre Marker.....	54 E4	Mandukhai Hotel.....	100 B4
Arts Council of Mongolia.....	55 C3	Mongolian Properties.....	101 C5
Bakula Rinpoche Süm.....	56 B3	Narantuul Hotel.....	102 A4
Central Sports Palace.....	57 F3	Nassan's Guest House.....	103 D3
Centre of Shaman Eternal Heavenly		Puma Imperial.....	104 E2
Sophistication.....	58 A4	Seoul Hotel.....	105 B4
Children's Art & Creation		UB Guesthouse.....	106 B4
Centre.....	59 E1	Ulaanbaatar Hotel.....	107 F3
Chinggis Khaan Statue.....	60 E3	Zaluuchud Hotel.....	108 F2
Chojin Lama Temple Museum.....	61 E4	Zaya Backpacker Hostel.....	109 B4
Dashcholon Khiid.....	62 F1	<b>EATING</b> ☑	
Federation for the Preservation of		Ala Turka.....	110 B4
Mahayana Tradition (FPMT).....	63 C3	Ananda Café & Meditation	
Gandan (Gandantegchinlen)		Centre.....	111 C2
Khiid.....	64 A2	Ba Shu Restaurant.....	112 C4
Ger to Ger Head Office.....	65 C4	BD's Mongolian Barbeque.....	113 A5
Gesar Süm.....	66 B2	Berlin.....	114 C2
Hunting Museum.....	67 A4	Brau Haus.....	115 B5
Karakorum Expeditions.....	68 C6	Café Amsterdam.....(see 44)	
Lenin Museum.....	69 C2	California.....	116 B5
Lenin Statue.....	70 F3	Casablanca.....(see 87)	
Mongolian Artists' Exhibition		CCCP.....	117 E2
Hall.....	71 E4	Chez Bernard.....	118 C4
Mongolian National Modern Art		Chinggis Club.....	119 D1
Gallery.....	72 F3	City Café.....(see 71)	
Mongolian Stock Exchange.....	73 D3	Container Market.....	120 B3
Museum of Natural History.....	74 D2	El Latino.....	121 C4
Museum of the General Intelligence		Emerald Bay.....	122 C5
Agency.....	75 D3	Grand Khaan Irish Pub.....	123 D4
National Museum of Mongolian		Ikht Mongol.....	124 C6
History.....	76 D3	Indra.....	125 D3
Old Train Engines.....	77 D6	Khaan Buuz.....	126 B4
Parliament (Government)		Le Bistro Français.....	127 E2
House.....	78 E3	Los Bandidos.....	128 E1
Statue of Sükhbaatar.....	79 E3	Marco Polo.....	129 B5
Statue of Zorig.....	80 E4	Michelle's French Bakery.....	130 C4
Tasgany Ovoo.....	81 B1	Millie's Café.....	131 E4
Theatre Museum.....	82 F3	Minii Delguur, Passage & Merkuri	
Titan Fitness.....	83 D6	Markets.....	132 B6
Victims of Political Persecution		Mokran Pyongyang	
Memorial Museum.....	84 F4	Restaurant.....	133 A4
Wedding Palace.....	85 E4	Narya Café.....	134 C3
Zanabazar Museum of Fine		Nomad Legends Mongol	
Arts.....	86 C3	Club.....	135 D2
<b>SLEEPING</b> ☑			
Bayangol Hotel.....	87 E5	Pizza Della Casa.....	136 B4
Chinggis Guesthouse.....	88 D5	Sacher's Café.....	137 D3
Continental Hotel.....	89 F5	Shilla.....	138 D5
Corporate Hotel.....	90 E5	Silk Road Bar & Grill.....	139 E4
Gana's Guest House.....	91 A3	Soyolj.....	140 F1
Genex Hotel.....	92 A4	Stupa Café.....(see 63)	
GobiTours & Guesthouse.....	93 D4	Taj Mahal.....(see 87)	
Golden Gobi.....	94 C4	Taliin Mongol.....	141 D3
Guide House Hotel.....	95 F1	UB Deli.....	142 C5
Hotel Örgöö.....	96 D3	Werner's Deli.....(see 132)	
Idre's Guest House.....	97 A6	Zochin Buuz.....	143 C4
<b>DRINKING</b> ☑			
		Crystal Lounge.....	144 C4
		Dave's Place.....	145 E3
		Detroit Bar.....(see 113)	
		Dublin.....	146 B5
		Greenland.....	147 E4
		Khan Brau.....	148 E4
		Level.....(see 109)	
		UB Club.....	149 C3
<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> ☑			
		Face Club.....	150 C3
		History Club.....	151 B3
		Muse.....(see 140)	
		National Academic Drama	
		Theatre.....	152 E5
		Oasis.....	153 C5
		Palace of Culture.....	154 E3
		River Sounds.....	155 F4
		Silence.....(see 114)	
		State Circus.....	156 C6
		State Opera & Ballet	
		Theatre.....	157 E3
		State Youth & Children's	
		Theatre.....	158 E5
		Tengis.....	159 B2
		Tsuki House.....	160 C6
		Zouq.....	161 E4
<b>SHOPPING</b> ☑			
		Amarbayasgalant Antique.....	162 C3
		Argasan.....	163 A5
		Ayanchin Outfitters.....	164 A5
		Canon Showroom.....	165 B4
		Computerland.....	166 B4
		Egshighlen Magnai National Musical	
		Instrument Shop.....	167 D2
		Eternal Art Antique Shop.....(see 167)	
		Fuji Film.....	168 D3
		Gobi Cashmere Shop.....	169 C4
		Mon Nip Camera Shop.....	170 A4
		Möngön Zaviya.....	171 C4
		Nomads Culture Antique	
		Shop.....	172 C3
		Northland.....	173 B4
		Pro Shack.....	174 C1
		Red Ger Art Gallery.....(see 86)	
		Seven Summits.....	175 D4
		Shonkhor Saddles.....	176 C1
		Souvenir House.....	177 C4
		State Department Store.....	178 C4
		Tsagaan Alt Wool Shop.....	179 B4
<b>TRANSPORT</b>			
		Aero Mongolia.....	180 F3
		Aeroflot.....	181 B5
		Blue Sky Aviation.....	182 D4
		EZ Nis.....	183 D5
		MIAT Airline Head Office.....	184 D3
		Sixt Mongolia.....	185 A5
		Sixt Mongolia.....(see 7)	
		Taxi Stand.....	186 C2
		Taxi Stand.....	187 C3
		Teeveriin Tovchoo.....	188 A6
		United Airlines.....(see 3)	

## VICTIMS OF POLITICAL PERSECUTION MEMORIAL MUSEUM

This little-known museum (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 592; cnr Gendeniin Gudamj & Olympiin Örgön Chölöö; admission US\$2, photos US\$5, video US\$10; ☹ 9am-5pm) consists of a series of haunting displays that chronicle the bloody communist purges of the 1930s – an aggressive campaign to eliminate ‘counter-revolutionaries’. During the campaign, intellectuals were arrested and put on trial, sent to Siberian labour camps or shot. Mongolia lost its top writers, scientists and thinkers. One hall reveals this tragedy most vividly with a display of human skulls pierced with bullet holes.

The museum was inspired by the deeds of former prime minister P Genden, who was executed in Moscow by the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB; Committee for State Security) in 1937 for refusing Stalin's orders to carry out the purge. Stalin found a more willing puppet in Marshall Choibalsan, whose purge ended in the deaths of more than 28,000 Mongolians, mostly lamas. The house containing the museum once belonged to Genden and it was his daughter, Tserendulam, who converted it into a museum in 1996.

The large, white square building located just southwest of the museum, is called the **Wedding Palace** (Map pp70-1; Khurimiin Ordon). Built in 1976 by the Russians, it has since been used for tens of thousands of wedding ceremonies, including the marital vows of a few foreigners.

## OTHER MUSEUMS

The **Ulaanbaatar City Museum** (Map p64; ☎ 450 960; Peace Ave; admission T1500; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) offers a brief but insightful view of Ulaanbaatar's history through old maps and photos. The most interesting item is a huge painting of the capital as it looked in 1912, in which you can clearly make out major landmarks such as Gandan Khiid and the Winter Palace of Bogd Khan.

The **Museum of the General Intelligence Agency** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 264 281, 5126 4281; admission T1000; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) is dedicated to the Mongolian version of the KGB and the spy game dating back to the Chinggis Khaan era. The curators are retired secret service agents and will provide colourful insight on some of the photographs (all captions are in Mongolian). To get there, walk behind the National Museum and down a narrow alley

heading west. It's on the left side of the alley. If the museum is locked, try ringing or ask at the front desk of the General Intelligence Agency (GIA) headquarters on Juulchin Gudamj.

The **International Intellectual Museum** (Map p64; ☎ 461 470; www.iqmuseum.mn; Peace Ave 10; admission T3000; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat), also known as the Mongolian Toy Museum, is in a pink building behind the round 'East Centre'. It has a collection of puzzles and games made by local artists. One puzzle requires 56,831 movements to complete, says curator Zandraa Tumen-Ulzii.

The **Railway Museum** (Map p64; ☎ 944 493; Octoberyn Gudamj; admission free; ☹ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) is great for kids and railway buffs. It is about 400m northeast of the station. Other train-spotting options include the **old train engines** (Map pp70-1) parked in front of the Jiguur Grand hotel.

The **Theatre Museum** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 320; Amaryn Gudamj; admission T1000; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) is worthwhile if you're interested in the dramatic arts – the collection of puppets is wonderful. The museum is on the 3rd floor of the Palace of Culture (its entrance is on the northern side of building).

The **Hunting Museum** (Map pp70-1; Öndör Geegen Zanabazaryn Gudamj; admission T1000; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), on the 2nd floor of the Baigal Ordon (Nature Palace) on the street leading to Gandan Khiid, shows off centuries-old trapping and hunting techniques that are used by both nomads and urban cowboys. It's usually locked so ask for the key from the ladies running the hotel downstairs.

## Monasteries & Temples

Around the start of the 19th century, more than 100 *süm* (temples) and *khiid* (monasteries) served a population of only about 50,000 in Ulaanbaatar. Only a handful survived the religious purges of 1937. Only since the early 1990s have the people of Mongolia started to openly practise Buddhism again.

## GANDAN KHIID ГАНДАН ХИЙД

This **monastery** (Gandantegchinlen Khiid; Map pp70-1; Öndör Geegen Zanabazaryn Gudamj; admission free; ☹ 9am-9pm) is one of Mongolia's most important, and also one of its biggest tourist attractions. The full name, Gandantegchinlen, translates roughly as 'the great place of complete joy'.

Building was started in 1838 by the fourth Bogd Geegen, but like most monasteries in

petrified wood, dinosaur eggs and some huge leg bones, which look like something out of the Flintstones. Look out for the world-famous 'fighting dinosaurs', a velociraptor and protoceratops that were buried alive

(probably when a sand dune collapsed on top of them) in the midst of mortal combat, some 80 million years ago. For more on Mongolia's remarkable dinosaurs see the boxed text, p206.

### ZORIG – THE FATHER OF MONGOLIAN DEMOCRACY

While Mongolia's 1990 pro-democracy demonstrations were gathering steam, a mob appeared on Sükhbaatar Sq, poised to lay siege to the Parliament House and the meagre police force protecting it. Foreseeing a bloodbath, activist leader Sanjaasürengiin Zorig clambered onto the shoulders of his comrades and ordered the demonstrators to sit, and they listened.

The image of Zorig pacifying the crowd from the steps of the Parliament House became iconic of the 1990 Revolution, and said much about the man's persona. A pragmatist and a negotiator, Zorig was known for his ability to find common ground between party officials and the agitators on the street.

Like other young reformers of his generation, Zorig was Moscow-educated and the son of a prominent Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) member; he was well placed to lead Mongolia through of confusion of its transformation from a communist state to a democracy and market economy. For his efforts he was known as the 'Golden Magpie of Democracy.'

On 2 October 1998, the 36-year-old Zorig, was stabbed 18 times by masked assailants in his apartment. The incident occurred during a period of political instability, and he was the likely candidate for the vacant position of prime minister.

The killers have never been brought to justice, though his death is linked to a corrupt casino deal, which he helped to block. A decade on, the government and police have revealed few clues as to their findings.

The murder came as a great shock to the Mongolian people, who lined the streets in their tens of thousands for the burial procession. A statue of Zorig was unveiled on his birthday, 20 April, in 1999 opposite the Central Post Office, to honour his legacy.

Zorig's efforts to fight corruption have been carried on by his sister Oyun, who left her job as a geologist to win Zorig's seat in parliament. She now heads her own political party, as well as the **Zorig Foundation** ([www.zorigfoundation.org.mn](http://www.zorigfoundation.org.mn)), which promotes democracy, transparency and good governance in Mongolia.

Mongolia the purges of 1937 fell heavily on Gandan. When the US Vice President Henry Wallace asked to see a monastery during his visit to Mongolia in 1944, then prime minister Choibalsan guiltily scrambled to open this one to cover up the fact that he had recently laid waste to Mongolia's religious heritage. The *khüid* remained a 'show monastery' for other foreign visitors until 1990 when full religious ceremonies commenced. Today, more than 600 monks belong to the monastery.

As you enter the main entrance from the south, a path leads towards the right to a courtyard containing two temples. The north-east building is **Ochidara Temple** (sometimes called Gandan Süm) where the most significant ceremonies are held. Following the *kora* (pilgrim) path clockwise around this building, the large statue behind glass is **Tsongkhapa**, the founder of the Gelugpa sect. The two-storey **Didan-Lavran temple** in the courtyard was home to the 13th Dalai Lama during his stay here in 1904.

At the end of the main path as you enter is the magnificent white **Migjid Janraisig Süm** (admission T2500, photos T5000, video T10,000; ☎ 9am-6pm

May-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Apr), the monastery's main attraction. Lining the walls of the temple are hundreds of images of Ayush, the Buddha of longevity, which stare through the gloom to the magnificent Migjid Janraisig statue.

The original statue was commissioned by the eighth Bogd Khan in 1911, in hopes that it might restore his eyesight – syphilis had blinded him; however it was carted away by Russia in 1937 (it was allegedly melted down to make bullets). The new statue was dedicated in 1996 and built with donations from Japan and Nepal. It is 26m high and made of copper with a gilt gold covering. The hollow statue contains 27 tonnes of medicinal herbs, 334 sutras, two million bundles of mantras, plus an entire ger with furniture!

To the east of the temple are four colleges of Buddhist philosophy, including the yellow building dedicated to Kalachakra, a wrathful Buddhist deity.

To the west of the temple is the **Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar Buddhist University**, established in 1970. It is usually closed to foreigners.

You can take photos around the monastery and in Migjid Janraisig Süm, but not inside

the other temples. Try to be there for the captivating ceremonies – they usually start at around 10am, though you may be lucky and see one at another time. Most chapels are closed in the afternoon.

Pickpockets sometimes target the monastery, so take care, especially when among crowds.

### WINTER PALACE OF BOGD KHAN

БОГД ХААНЫ ӨВЛИЙН ОРДОН  
Built between 1893 and 1903, this **palace** (Map p64; ☎ 342 195; Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; admission T2500, photos US\$10, video US\$15; ☎ 9am-5.30pm summer, 9.30am-4.30pm Fri-Tue winter) is the place where Mongolia's eighth Living Buddha, and last king, Jebtzun Damba Hutagt VIII (often called the Bogd Khan), lived for 20 years. For reasons that are unclear, the palace was spared destruction by the Russians and turned into a museum. The summer palace, on the banks of Tuul Gol, was completely destroyed.

There are six temples in the grounds. The white building to the right as you enter is the Winter Palace itself. It contains a collection of gifts received from foreign dignitaries, such as a pair of golden boots from a Russian tsar, a robe made from 80 unfortunate foxes and a ger lined with the skins of 150 snow leopards. Mongolia's Declaration of Independence (from China) is among the exhibits.

The Bogd Khan's penchant for unusual wildlife explains the extraordinary array of stuffed animals in the palace. Some of it had been part of his personal zoo – look out for the photo of the Bogd's elephant, purchased from Russia for 22,000 roubles.

The Winter Palace is a few kilometres south of the Square. It is a bit too far to walk, so take a taxi or catch bus 7 or 19. A **booklet** (T2200), available at the entrance, gives a very brief explanation of the temples in English, and includes a handy map showing the temple locations.

### CHOIJIN LAMA TEMPLE MUSEUM

ЧОЙЖИН ЛАМЫН ХИЙД-МУЗЕЙ  
This **temple museum** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 788; <http://choijin.on.mn>; admission T2500, photos T5500, video T12,000; ☎ 9am-6.30pm mid-May–Sep, 10am-4pm Oct–mid-May) is a hidden gem of architecture and history, smack in the middle of downtown Ulaanbaatar. Sadly, it's under threat of losing its quaint character, as shoddily constructed buildings are thrown up all around it. Already

the view of the complex is hindered by ugly buildings that now form its backdrop.

Still, Chojin Lama is well worth a visit. It was the home of Luvsan Haidav Chojin Lama ('Chojin' is an honorary title given to some monks), the state oracle and brother of the Bogd Khan. The construction of the monastery commenced in 1904 and was completed four years later. It was closed in 1938 and probably would have been demolished but it was saved as a museum in 1942 to demonstrate the 'feudal' ways of the past. Although religious freedom in Mongolia recommenced in 1990, this monastery is no longer an active place of worship.

There are five temples within the grounds. As you enter, the first temple you see is the **Maharaja Süm**. The **main temple** features statues of Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha), Chojin Lama and Baltung Choimba (the teacher of the Bogd Khan), whose mummified remains are inside the statue. There are also some fine *thangka* and some of the best *tsam* masks in the country. The *gongkhang* (protector chapel) behind the main hall contains the oracle's throne and a magnificent statue of *yab-yum* (mystic sexual union).

The other temples are **Zuu Süm**, dedicated to Sakyamuni; **Yadam Süm**, which contains wooden and bronze statues of various gods, some created by the famous Mongolian sculptor Zanabazar; and **Amgalan Süm**, containing a self-portrait of Zanabazar himself and a small stupa apparently brought to Ulaanbaatar by Zanabazar from Tibet.

Free cultural performances are held here in summer at 5pm; this is a great chance to see *tsam*-mask dancing and listen to *khöömii* (throat singing). The complex is located off Jamyn Gunii Gudamj, with the entrance on the south side.

### CENTRE OF SHAMAN ETERNAL HEAVENLY

SOPHISTICATION МӨНХ ТЭНГЭРИЙН ШИД БӨӨ ШҮТЭЭНИЙ ТӨВ  
Ulaanbaatar's official **Shaman Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9994 3609; Öndör Gegeen Zanabazaryn Gudamj; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Sun-Fri May-Sep) is a ramshackle collection of squalid gers teetering on the slope that leads to Gandan Monastery. While not particularly mystifying at first sight, this is the real deal, with a bona fide shaman at its helm, holding daily court. The resident shaman, Zorigtbaatar, is known for his fiery orations that rile up the faithful into a frenzy. There are two gers: one that honours

the shamanic spirits and another that replicates nature, complete with a small lake, trees and stuffed animals. It is in the nature ger where the shaman performs his dance. If there is a ceremony going on, and you want your fortune told, you'll need to make a small donation.

#### OTHER MONASTERIES & TEMPLES

Belonging to Gandan Khiid, **Gesar Süm** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 148; cnr Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö & Ikh Toiruu west; admission free; ☞ 9am-8pm) is named after the mythical Tibetan king. The lovely temple is a fine example of Chinese-influenced architecture. It is a popular place for locals to request, and pay for, *puja* (a blessing ceremony). Allegedly, the temple was placed here to stop the movement of the hill behind it, which was slowly creeping towards the centre of the city. It's easy to visit the temple as it lies between Gandan and the city centre.

**Tasgany Ovoо** (Map pp70-1), about 300m north of Gesar Süm, is worth a look if you haven't yet seen an *ovoо*, a sacred pyramid-shaped collection of stones.

The **Bakula Rinpoche Süm** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 366; admission free; ☞ 9am-6pm), also known as the Pethub Stangey Choskhor Ling Khiid, was founded in 1999 by the late Indian ambassador, himself a reincarnate lama from Ladakh. The Rinpoche's ashes were interred inside a golden stupa inside the temple in July 2004. The monastery, used mainly as a centre for Buddhist teaching, also has a **Centre for Buddhist Medicine** (☎ 9199 7894; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat). The monastery is not a must-see unless you are interested in learning about traditional medicine. The complex is located where Ikh Toiruu meets Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö, behind the Container Market.

**Dashchoilon Khiid** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 350 047; Academich Sodnomyn Gudamj; admission free) was originally built in 1890, but was destroyed in the late 1930s. The monastery was partially rebuilt and is now located in three huge concrete gers that once formed part of the State Circus. There are plans afoot to expand the monastery to include a six-storey building which will house a 17m-high statue of Mairdar. So far, the only part of the statue to exist is the 108-bead rosary, donated by monks from Japan (each bead weighs 45.5kg, making it the largest in the world). You can get to Dashchoilon from a lane running off Baga Toiruu – look out for the orange-and-brown roof.

#### Art Galleries

As well as music, Mongolians love the visual arts, and there are a number of galleries in Ulaanbaatar worth visiting.

#### MONGOLIAN NATIONAL MODERN ART GALLERY МОНГОЛЫН УРАН ЗУРГИЙН ҮЗЭСГЭЛЭН

Sometimes called the **Fine Art Gallery** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 331 687; admission T2000, photos T5000, video T10,000; ☞ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Apr), it contains a large and impressive display of modern and uniquely Mongolian paintings and sculptures. It has a mixture of depictions of nomadic life, people and landscapes, ranging from impressionistic to nationalistic. The Soviet romantic paintings depicted in *thangka* style are especially interesting, but the most famous work is Tsevegjav Ochir's 1958 *The Fight of the Stallions*.

The entrance is in the courtyard of the Palace of Culture. The main gallery is on the 3rd floor, there are temporary exhibits on the 2nd floor and a shop on the 1st floor.

#### OTHER ART GALLERIES

A unique cultural experience in Ulaanbaatar is a visit to the studios of the **Mongolian National Artists Union** (Уран Бүтээлчдийн Урлан; Map p64; ☎ 325 849; www.uma.mn; cnr Erkhuguiin Gudamj & Ikh Toiruu; ☞ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm). The artists are welcoming and you can offer to buy their work on the spot. It's in a blue building with a bronze statue of a seated monk above the door. The **Arts Council of Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ reservations 319 015; www.artscouncil.mn; cnr Juulchin Gudamj & Baruun Selbe Gudamj) conducts tours here for US\$25 per group of five.

If you want to see more Mongolian art, and maybe buy some, head into the **Mongolian Artists' Exhibition Hall** (Монголын Зураачдын Үзэсгэлэн Танхим; Map pp70-1; ☎ 327 474; cnr Peace Ave & Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; admission free; ☞ 9am-6pm), on the 2nd floor of the white marble building diagonally opposite the CPO. This is a rotating collection of modern and often dramatic paintings, carvings, tapestries and sculptures. The displays often change and there's a good souvenir shop.

The **Children's Art & Creation Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 426; Baga Toiruu north; admission T3000; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) shows off the extraordinary art of young Mongolians. Themes are mainly traditional scenes of hunting and pastoralism.

#### ULAANBAATAR'S ONE MILLIONTH CITIZEN: NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

When Ulaanbaatar's official population hit one million people in 2007, the city authorities decided this milestone was cause for celebration. Three newborns were credited as the city's official millionth citizens, an honour that earned each a set of keys to brand new apartments.

But who really deserved such a title? Quaint as it may be to honour the newborns, Ulaanbaatar's one millionth citizen was more likely an internal migrant from the countryside, arriving in the capital without money or prospects for work.

The statistics tell the truth behind the city smokescreen – from 2004 to 2007 Ulaanbaatar's population has increased by 12% while the population of rural aimags decreased on average by 1% to 3%. Töv aimag has been hardest hit by the problem, losing more than 20% of its population.

While a better life in the city may seem attractive to Mongolia's rural poor, the rapid urbanisation of the country is having a critical impact on several fronts. Ulaanbaatar's infrastructure is unable to cope with the influx of cars and people. Traffic jams wreak havoc while expanding ger (yurt) districts crawl up once-virgin hillsides. Air pollution in winter is 10 times higher than healthy levels.

Meanwhile, the newly arrived migrants are not finding life in Ulaanbaatar to be much easier than the countryside. In 2006, only 2.5% of the internal migrants to Ulaanbaatar found permanent housing. The highly touted 40,000 homes project, which seeks to build apartments for low-income families, proceeds at a pace too slow to keep up with demand. If current trends continue, half of the national population will live in Ulaanbaatar within 10 years.

Leaders do recognise this growing problem although little has been done to stem the tide of internal migrants. Current business policies and infrastructure make it almost impossible to do serious business anywhere but Ulaanbaatar and the national road-development scheme is basically designed to funnel traffic, and people, into the capital. Unless serious regional development plans are worked out the situation seems destined to only grow worse.

#### Other Sights

##### SÜKHBAATAR SQUARE

##### СУХБААТАРЫН ТАЛБЯЙ

In July 1921 in the centre of Ulaanbaatar, the 'hero of the revolution', Damdin Sükhbaatar, declared Mongolia's final independence from the Chinese. The Square (Map pp70-1) now bears his name and features a **statue** of him astride his horse. The words he apparently proclaimed at the time are engraved on the bottom of the statue: 'If we, the whole people, unite in our common effort and common will, there will be nothing in the world that we cannot achieve, that we will not have learnt or failed to do.'

Sükhbaatar would have been very disappointed to learn that the Square was also where the first protests were held in 1990, which eventually led to the fall of communism in Mongolia. Today, the Square is occasionally used for rallies, ceremonies and even rock concerts, but is generally a serene place where only the photographers are doing anything. Near the centre of the Square, look for the large plaque that lists the former names of the city – Örgöö, Nomiin Khuree, Ikh Khuree and Niislel Khuree.

The enormous marble construction on the north end was completed in 2006 in time for the 800-year anniversary of Chinggis Khaan's coronation. At its centre is a seated bronze **Chinggis Khaan statue** lordling over his nation. He is flanked by Ögedei (on the west) and Kublai (east). Two famed Mongol soldiers (Boruchu and Mukhlai) guard the entrance to the monument.

Behind the Ghengis monument stands **Parliament House**, which is commonly known as Government House. An inner courtyard of the building actually holds a large ceremonial ger used for hosting visiting dignitaries.

To the northeast of the Square is the tall, modern **Palace of Culture**, a useful landmark containing the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery and several other cultural institutions. At the southeast corner of the Square, the salmon-pinkish building is the **State Opera & Ballet Theatre**.

The clay-red building to the southwest is the **Mongolian Stock Exchange**, which was opened in 1992 in the former Children's Cinema. The small park opposite the Stock Exchange contains a **0-kilometer marker**, the point from



which all distances in Mongolia are measured. For a blast from the past, walk east from the southeast corner of the Square to the **Lenin statue**. (For an even more dramatic bust of Lenin walk into the former **Lenin Museum**, on the north side of Liberty Sq.)

### ZAISAN MEMORIAL & BUDDHA PARK

The tall, thin landmark on top of the hill south of the city is the **Zaisan Memorial** (Зайсан Тонрой; off Map p64). Built by the Russians to commemorate 'unknown soldiers and heroes' from various wars, it offers the best views of Ulaanbaatar and the surrounding hills. The enormous tank at the bottom of the hill – part of the Mongolia People's Tank Brigade – saw action against the Nazis during WWII.

West of the memorial is the **Buddha Park**, featuring a 16m-tall standing Sakyamuni image. The funds to build the park were donated by a 99-year-old Mongolian monk named Guru Dev. Below the statue is a small room containing *thangkas*, sutras and images of the Buddha and his disciples.

To get there, catch bus 7 to the memorial. This bus departs from the Bayangol Hotel or Baga Toiruu near Anod Bank.

### NAIRAMDAL PARK НАЙРАМДАЛ ПАРК

Also called the Children's Park, **Nairamdal Park** (Friendship Park; Map pp70-1), which includes a small amusement park, is being renovated by a Japanese company and will hopefully be operational by 2008. You can enter the park from south of the of Chojjin Lama Temple Museum, or opposite the Bayangol Hotel.

### ACTIVITIES

For a swim, try the heated **indoor pool** (Map p64; ☎ 318 180; Zaluuchuudyn Örgön Chölöö; per hr T4500; ☎ 8am-8pm Wed-Sun, closed 15 Jul-1 Aug) at the Zaluus Youth & Cultural Centre. When it's closed in summer you can join the locals and jump in the Tuul near the bridge by Zaisan Memorial. Across the street from the pool, the **Orchlon Gym** (Map p64; ☎ 354 326; Zaluuchuudyn Örgön Chölöö; per day/month T20,000/US\$120; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Thu, 7am-7pm Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) has modern exercise facilities. **Titan Fitness** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9905 2427; Chingisin Örgön Chölöö; per day/month T6000/60,000; ☎ 6am-9pm) is another good option.

The **UB Golf Club** (off Map p64; ☎ 9979 9945, 9976 3377; 1 round US\$20, caddy US\$5, ball boy US\$1) is a wild place where balls tend to get swallowed up even on the fairways – down marmot holes or

in the high grass. It's located 20km west of the city, about 3km before the Nairamdal Zulsan International Children's Centre. Additionally, there are two golf courses in Terej National Park (p111).

If you are interested in paragliding lessons, contact Fly Mongolia (p114).

### WALKING TOUR

**Start/Finish** Sükhbaatar Sq  
**Distance** 5km  
**Duration** 2½ hours

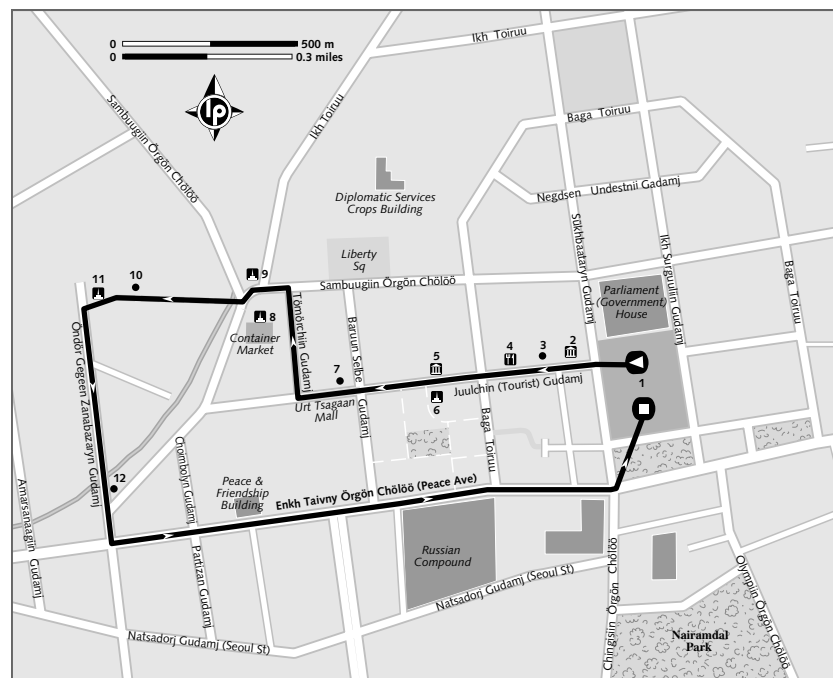
This walking tour will take you between some of the main downtown historical sites. Some parts are fairly exposed to the summer sun so bring a hat and sunblock.

Begin in **Sükhbaatar Sq** (1; p77) and head to the northwest corner where you'll spot the square-shaped **National Museum of Mongolian History** (2; p69). This offers a worthwhile introduction to Mongolian culture and will give you some idea of things you can expect to see in the countryside. Across the street is a Japanese garden donated by a Mongolian sumo wrestler.

Continue walking west on the newly named 'Tourist St'; the grey building on your right is the headquarters of the **General Intelligence Agency** (3, the Mongolian KGB), which has an excellent museum around the back. At the end of this building is **Talin Mongol** (4; p86) our favourite restaurant in the city for Mongolian food (come back here later for dinner). On the next block you'll spot the **Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts** (5; p69) which faces something called Builder's Sq. Across the street from the square is the **Federation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition** (6; opposite) Buddhist centre and its excellent Stupa Café – definitely worth popping in for a drink or snack. Between FPMT and the next street there are several excellent antique shops that are worth browsing.

The next block is **Urt Tsagaan** (7) pedestrian mall. There is nothing terribly exciting about the place, although it does have plenty of small shops, cafés, barbers and little stalls selling clothing and knick-knacks.

Continue towards Gandan Khiid, passing **Bakula Rinpoche Süm** (8; p76) and **Gesar Süm** (9; p76). The lane uphill towards Gandan Khiid leads into the original ger district that has circled the monastery for 170 years. Near



the eastern gate you might see **fortune tellers** (10) who make divinations using coins, sheep ankle bones and tarot cards. From **Gandan Khiid** (11; p73), walk down Öndör Geegen Zanabazaryn Gudamj, passing the **Centre of Shaman Eternal Heavenly Sophistication** (12; p75) on your left. End this tour with a stroll down Peace Ave and back to the Square.

### COURSES Language

It's possible to ask around for 'exchange lessons' at the National University of Mongolia and the Institute of Foreign Languages (p80) in Ulaanbaatar. A better idea is to attend one of the language schools in Ulaanbaatar, which can organise long- and short-term courses. Recommended schools in Ulaanbaatar include the following:

**Bridge Mongolian Language Center** (off Map p64; ☎ 367 149; www.bridge.url.mn/english; PO Box 955, Ulaanbaatar-13) Receiving consistently positive reviews, this language centre offers an intensive two-week survival course, as well as longer courses and individual tuition. Costs are US\$5 to US\$7 per hour for a private lesson or US\$4 per person for a group lesson. Note that the direc-

tions it gives on its website are obsolete; it's on the eastern side of the city past the Khan Palace hotel.

**Friends School** (off Map p64; ☎ 454 513; www.friendscompany.mn; Apt 64/2 Bayanzürkh District, 5th Microdistrict) Short-term survival Mongolian classes are available. Located just northeast of the Bridge School.

**International Language Center** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 727; www.ilcschool.com; Choimbolyn 6) Language courses for a reasonable T40,000 per month or T5000 per hour. Convenient central location.

### Buddhism

The **Federation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition** (FPMT; Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 580, 9987 9535; www.fpmtmongolia.mn; Builder's Sq, Juulchin Gudamj) is involved in the regeneration of Buddhist culture in Mongolia. The centre offers free lectures and courses on various aspects of Buddhist tradition and meditation. Lectures are given in English (at the time of writing, Monday to Thursday at 6.30pm); look for the pink-tiled building west of the Mormon Church.

### Yoga

The Ananda Café & Meditation Centre (p90) offers yoga courses nightly at 6.30pm. (Hatha

yoga with chanting and meditation.) Contact ☎ 9913 2100 for details.

## University Courses

The **National University of Mongolia** (NUM; Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 159; www.num.edu.mn; Ikh Surguuliin Gudamj 1, PO Box 46a/523, 210646) is northeast of Sükhbaatar Sq. The school offers specialised classes on Mongolian culture and language, and has a foreign-student department. The office is in the main building, room 213. Response to these programmes by students is quite mixed particularly when it comes to teaching Mongolian (the general consensus is that the language schools do a much better job at this).

Flexible group and private Mongolian-language lessons are available at the **Institute of International Studies** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 860; dash.purev@magicnet.mn), opposite the university.

The **American Center for Mongolian Studies** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 350 486; www.mongoliacenter.org; National University of Mongolia, Bldg 5, Room 304) has a good website listing courses and can recommend study possibilities.

## TOURS Ulaanbaatar

It is not particularly easy to join an organised tour of Ulaanbaatar if you have arrived as an independent traveller. You can try to contact one of the companies offering tours under Outside Ulaanbaatar (right) and see what they have available.

Ulaanbaatar is a walkable city so it's easy enough to see it on your own using this guide and a map. Alternatively, leave this book in your hotel and go and wander off on your own for a while. Although not really necessary, if you do hire a taxi to drive you around, a guide-cum-interpreter could be handy.

The **Arts Council of Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 015; www.artscouncil.mn; cnr Juulchin Gudamj & Baruun Selbe Gudamj) sponsors two excellent specialised city tours twice a month or by appointment. 'Myths and Truths: the Socialist Legacy in Mongolia Tour' visits places associated with the communist era, and the 'Mongolian Buddhism Tour' explores Ulaanbaatar's Buddhist legacy beyond the main tourist attractions. Both tours, which last from 10am to 4pm, provide excellent commentary and lunch at a nice restaurant. Prices vary depending on the size of your group, but count on paying about US\$70 per person.

## Outside Ulaanbaatar

Of the hundred or more travel agencies offering tours that have sprung up around Ulaanbaatar in the past few years, the dozen or so listed following are recommended as being generally reliable. You can expect to pay around US\$30 to US\$50 including food, accommodation, tickets to sights and guide (who will double as a cook). The price of a vehicle is an extra US\$60 per day including driver and petrol, so you can lower your costs if you have more people to split this cost.

Budget travellers often organise ad-hoc tours via their guesthouse or Chez Bernard Café (p90). If you do this try to meet the driver and guide before the trip and ensure that everyone knows the itinerary and exactly what is included. Khongor, Idre's, Golden Gobi and UB guesthouses (see p82) all run fairly standard trips that get consistently good reviews. Shop around and see who can offer the most creative schedule at the best price. You can expect to pay around US\$50 to US\$60 for a vehicle and another US\$15 per day for a guide (optional). Budget tours don't include food or accommodation; however, they usually include stoves for cooking your own food and tents for camping out.

The main difference between the tour operators and the guesthouses is the quality of the guides. Guides from guesthouses are usually inexperienced in the field and not particularly knowledgeable when it comes to history or culture. Oftentimes they are students and their main qualification is that they can speak English (which at least allows you to communicate with locals and the driver). Tour operators, on the other hand, hire specialists in history and culture or they may be particularly skilled trekking or horse guides. This can be a huge help in the backcountry as rural guides and horse boys won't speak English.

In summer you may be approached by students or other young Mongols who organise their own tours, charging around US\$90 per day for up to six people. One such person is the delightfully energetic **Meg Erdenekhuu** (☎ 9964 3242; travelwith\_meg@hotmail.com) who specialises in trips to the Gobi (her area of expertise is geology and palaeontology) but can take you to virtually any corner of the country.

**Active Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 456; www.activemongolia.com) This reliable Scottish-German operation specialises in rugged hiking, rafting and horseback trips, plus mountain biking. Most of the trips are to the

## ASRAL & KUNCHAB JAMPA LING BUDDHIST CENTRE

Located in the northwest corner of the city, **Asral** (Map p64; ☎ 304 838; www.asralmongolia.org) is a new NGO and Buddhist social centre that supports impoverished families. Its main aim is to stop disadvantaged youths from becoming street children. It also provides skills and jobs for unemployed women; an on-site felt-making cooperative turns out some lovely products.

The Buddhist arm of the organisation has classes on Buddhism and meditation although for now these are only offered in Mongolian. In summer, a high Tibetan Lama, Panchen Otrul Rinpoche, visits the centre and provides religious teachings.

Asral encourages travellers to visit the centre. You can meet the felt-makers and buy their products or even volunteer your time. The centre is always looking for English teachers or gardeners to work on a small farm in Gachuurt. The centre is in the 3/4 district opposite the Gobi Sauna, slightly off the main road. It's best to call before you visit. Take bus 21, 29 or 13 to the last stop and continue walking for 300m. Asral is a two-storey cream-coloured building on your right.

aimags Khövsgöl, Arkhangai and Khentii. It's based at Seven Summits, opposite the CPD. Contact Sylvia Hay.

**Happy Camel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 8810 0133; www.happycamel.com; Peace Ave 27) It operates out of Chez Bernard; see p90.

**Hovsgol Travel Company** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 460 368; www.hovsgoltravel.com; PO Box 2003; Namyanjugiin Gudamj) Specialises in boat and horse trips around Khövsgöl. Runs the popular Camp Toilogt.

**Juulchin** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 428; www.juulchin.com; Bayangol Hotel, 5b Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö) Its office is at the back of Bayangol Hotel.

**Karakorum Expeditions** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 182, 9911 6729; www.gomongolia.com; PO Box 542) The leader in bike and hiking tours in western Mongolia, it also offers trips to China. The company has a good philosophy: a big plus is that it runs snow-leopard research trips and wildlife tours. The office is behind the State Circus in the Gangaryn Gurav building. Contact Graham Taylor.

**Khövsgöl Lodge Company** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9911 5929; www.boojum.com; Sükhbaatar District, Bldg 33, Room 16) This experienced outfitter is part of the US-based Boojum Expeditions. It is in an apartment block behind the Drama Theatre, but you are better off calling first to get someone to meet you. Contact Bobo or Anya.

**Mongolia Expeditions** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 279, 9909 6911; info@mongolia-expeditions.com; Jamyn Gunii Gudamj 5-2) Specialises in adventure travel, including cycle touring, mountaineering, caving and rafting trips, as well as more sedentary options such as flower-watching tours. It is particularly experienced in tours to western Mongolia. It's located on the west side of the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum.

**Nomadic Expeditions** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 396, 325 786; www.threecamellodge.com; Peace Ave 76) This is the Mongolian outfit of the US-based travel company (see the boxed text, p270).

**Nomadic Journeys** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 737; www.nomadicjourneys.com; Sükhbaataryn Gudamj 1) This Swedish-Mongolian joint venture, concentrating on low-

impact tourism, runs fixed-departure yak, camel and horse treks and can also arrange rafting trips on the Toul Gol. Its trip in Terelj is unique – you walk while yaks haul your own portable ger on a cart. This is a great outfit for the eco-conscious traveller. Contact Jan Wigsten or Manduhai. **Nomads** (Map pp70-1; ☎/fax 328 146; www.nomadstours.com; Suite 8-9, 3rd fl, Peace & Friendship Bldg, Peace Ave, PO Box 1008) Offers a wide range of fixed-departure tours, including popular horse treks in Khentii and through Terelj, visiting Günjiin Süm. Nomads also offers fabulous jeep trips to more remote areas in the far west and camel treks in the Gobi. Its office location will change in 2009; check the website.

**Radiant Sky** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9192 9366; www.radiant-sky.com; Peace Ave 15, Apt 6) Mongolian-run outfit that does reasonably priced tours across the country. It specialises in small-group horseback and jeep adventures in western and northern Mongolia.

**Rinky Dink Travel Mongolia** (☎ 9974 4162; www.rinkydinktravel.com, susanmongolia@yahoo.com; PO Box 1927) As the name indicates, this is a small tour company that keeps its trips simple, safe and fun. It has homestays in ger districts and takes you out of Ulaanbaatar to meet nomad families. It is involved in social development programmes in poor neighbourhoods and invites tourists to volunteer for its projects. There is no actual 'office' to drop into – you just contact them and they will pick you up.

**Samar Magic Tours** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 051, 9928 2459; www.samarmagictours.com; PO Box 329) Based at El Latino restaurant, this company runs fishing expeditions and a ger camp near Terelj. Contact Spanish- and English-speaking Christo Camilo Gavilla Gomez.

**Tseren Tours** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9974 0832, 327 083; www.tserentours.com; Baruun Selbe Gudamj 14/1) Dutch- and Mongolian-run outfit that does countrywide tours, biking trips and stays with nomad families.

**Tsolmon Travel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 870; www.tsolmontravel.com; Chinggis Örgön Chölöö 61/19) Country-wide tours and the operator of Buvet ger camp in Terelj.

**Wind of Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 754, 9909 0593; www.windofmongolia.mn; Sükhbaatar District, 5th Microdistrict, Bldg 17, Apt 15) This French-run tour operator offers creative and offbeat trips, including rock climbing, dog sledding (in winter) and tours that focus on Buddhism. Contact Joel Rauzy.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The biggest event in Ulaanbaatar is undoubtedly the **Naadam** (Festival), held on 11 and 12 July. Some visitors may not find the festival itself terribly exciting, but the associated activities during the Naadam week and the general festive mood make it a great time to visit. For more information, see the boxed text, p96.

Around Naadam and other public holidays, special cultural events and shows are organised. It is worth reading the local English-language newspapers and asking a Mongolian friend, guide or hotel staff member to find out what may be on.

At the end of July, on a date set by the lunar calendar, you can see **tsam-mask dancing** at Dashchoilon Khiid.

The last week in October sees the **city's birthday** – it was founded in 1639. Events and concerts are usually put on at this time at the Palace of Culture or State Opera & Ballet Theatre. See www.artscouncil.mn for details.

In the middle of March, it's definitely worth checking out the **Camel Polo Winter Festival**, featuring camel polo and racing. This is a nontouristy event and you'll be able to mix and mingle with spectators dressed in traditional attire (big *dels* – traditional coats – and boots). Participating teams come mainly from the Gobi and even Inner Mongolia. A camel parade in Sükhbaatar Sq is part of the festivities.

For more info see p255.

## SLEEPING

There is a wide range of places to stay in the capital city, with some of the best deals at the bottom and top ends. During the week surrounding Naadam, accommodation may be in short supply and prices are often higher.

### Budget APARTMENTS

If you are planning to stay in Ulaanbaatar for a while or you are travelling in a small group, it's worth looking around for an apartment to rent. A reasonable, furnished, two-bedroom apartment with a kitchen in an old Russian

building costs from US\$200 to US\$300 per month. Check the classified sections of the local English-language newspapers. **Mongolian Properties** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 545; www.mongolian-properties.com; Seoul St 48/13) has apartments for rent on a long-term basis. Another recommended agent is **Mongolian Real Estate** (☎ 9918 1786; www.mongolianrealestate.com). You could also ask at the guesthouses, which sometimes rent out apartments for around US\$20 to US\$30 per night for short-term stays.

### GUESTHOUSES

Most city guesthouses have been carved out of the old Russian apartments; this sometimes makes them hard to find as you need to weave through courtyards and find the correct door out of many anonymous steel doors. Most guesthouses offer a hot shower and a kitchen. Almost all offer trips to nearby attractions, as well as visa extension and registration, laundry and the booking of train tickets. If overbooked you may be shoved into an apartment with the owner's grandmother – there's always room for one more.

**Gana's Guest House** (Map pp70-1; ☎/fax 367 343; www.ganasger.mn; Gandan Khiid ger district, House No 22; dm/ger US\$3/5, d US\$15; ☑) If you fancy staying in a ger district, drop by this longtime backpacker hangout. Owner Gana has accommodation in private rooms inside a main block, or you could stay in a ger on the roof. Facilities include free internet, breakfast and 24-hour security. To find it, head up Öndör Gegeen Zanabazaryn Gudamj on the way to Gandan Khiid and look for the small sign that points right down a narrow alley.

**ourpick Khongor Guest House** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 316 415, 9925 2599; http://get.to/khongor; Peace Ave 15, Apt 6; dm/s/d US\$4/10/12; ☑) The experienced, English-speaking manager Toroo offers well-appointed accommodation in three separate buildings, each convenient and central. Amenities include free airport/train station pick up, breakfast, free email checks and safety lock-up box – check out the glowing reports on the website. Among the guesthouses, Khongor's trips get some of the best reviews and the management bends over backwards in handling logistics, ticketing and visa matters. The entrance of the guesthouse is around the back of the third building west of the State Department Store.

**Idre's Guest House** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 316 749, 9916 6049; www.idretour.com; Undsen Khuulin Gudamj; dm

### GOING UNDERGROUND

While the streets of Ulaanbaatar heave with traffic and congestion, a group of people have found quiet and warm refuge beneath the pavement. Since the early 1990s, homeless people (both adults and children) have made homes in the sewer systems of Ulaanbaatar. The sewers are particularly useful in winter when the hot water pipes keep them warm.

In the mid-1990s up to 6000 people lived in the sewers, most of them children. An increase in the number of orphanages has since brought the number down into the hundreds. Many of the kids (especially boys) prefer the freedom of the streets in summer rather than the strict rules and classes of homeless shelters, but winters are brutal. Girls often end up in prostitution. Both sexes suffer from high rates of malnutrition, syphilis, scabies and body lice.

Some kids who grew up on the streets in the 1990s are now part of a growing criminal element, although many are now in jail (if they haven't already died). There have been a few turnaround stories, however, including one former street girl who was taken in by the Lotus Children Centre, learned English and now makes US\$300 a month as a translator at a mining company.

Ulaanbaatar has around 20 shelters, many run by foreign NGOs, with beds for around 500 children. Several aid agencies work with the children, including **Save the Children** (www.savethechildren.org), the National Centre for Children and the **Lotus Children's Centre** (www.lotuschild.org).

The **Christina Noble Foundation** (☎ 9909 8377; www.cncf.org) operates a shelter on the edge of town and runs several education and health programmes. If you ring ahead you might be able to visit the facilities. The Lotus Children's Centre is also happy to meet visitors – visits are usually handled by Tseren Tours (p81). Money is not usually requested, but the centres are happy to accept donations.

US\$4, s/d US\$14/16, s/d without bathroom US\$12/14; ☑) Amiable host Idre has constructed a single-floor guesthouse with several dorms and private rooms. There is a central lounge, small kitchen and a book exchange. It's located near the old long-distance bus station (Teeveriin Tovchoo) in a dusty corner of town. Idre also runs ger accommodation in Töv Aimag, near Mandshir Khiid.

**UB Guesthouse** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 037, 9119 9859; www.ubquest.com; Tserendorjiin Gudamj; dm/s/d US\$5/10/16; ☑) At the time of writing this popular guesthouse was planning to move to a six-storey building opposite the State Department Store. The new guesthouse will have more than 100 beds, making it easily the biggest in this category. The management here gets very mixed reviews.

**Golden Gobi** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 632, 9665 4496; www.goldengobi.com; dm/d US\$5/16, d without bathroom US\$14; ☑) With its colourful walls, funky décor and friendly vibe, this has become one of the most popular backpacker places in town. It has two lounges and some rooms with private bathroom. A young, friendly and totally laid-back management is another bonus. Price includes breakfast. It's off the corner of Baruun Selbe Gudamj and Peace Ave.

**LG Guesthouse** (Map p64; ☎ 328 243, 9989 4672; www.lg.url.mn; Naryn Gudamj; dm US\$5-7, s/d US\$12/16; ☑)

With 12 rooms this is one of the largest guesthouses in the city. It has dorms and private rooms with attached bathroom, a common area, kitchen where you can cook your own meals and a restaurant on the ground floor. Bathrooms are clean and have hot-water boilers – important in summer when other places only have cold water. It's a little out of the centre, on the road towards the train station.

**Tiara Guesthouse** (Map p64; ☎ 2125 2319, 9905 4244; www.tiaraguesthouse.com; October St 28-35, Bogd Ar Subdistrict No 5A; dm US\$7; ☑) Likable Dutch- and Mongolian-run guesthouse with smart dorms and a brightly-lit lounge. It's one of the best backpacker setups in town, although a little outside the centre. It's hard to spot: with your back to the XAAH Bank, walk through the gap to the right of the Fresco Market (the red-roofed temple is to your right). After 50m turn left up the ramp and look for the sign.

**Zaya Backpacker Hostel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 316 696, 9918 5013; www.zayahostel.com; Peace Ave; dm US\$10, s/d US\$24/28, s/d with shared bathroom US\$22/24; ☑) Unlike most other guesthouses, this one is in a new building with hardwood floors, modern bathrooms, a comfortable lounge and new furnishings. Value for money, it's even better than most midrange hotels in the city. It's on the 3rd floor of an orange building behind the Peace & Friendship Building; when it's full,

guests are moved to less desirable apartments across the road (but pay the same rates).

**Oasis Café & Guesthouse** (off Map p64; ☎ 463 393, 9909 3696; www.intergam-oasis.com; Nalaikh Gudamj; US\$12; 📍) Austrian-German-run place with beautiful accommodation in dorms, gers and private rooms with attached bathroom. It has a large yard and a brightly-painted café, which serves excellent Austrian meals and pastries. Located 5km east of Sükhbaatar Sq (in the Amgalan district; GPS: N47° 54.706', E106° 58.857'). Prices include breakfast.

More recommended guesthouses include the following:

**Chinggis Guesthouse** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 325 941, 9927 1843; www.chinggisguest.mn; dm US\$6; 📍) Clean and friendly four-room apartment guesthouse. It's back behind the National Academic Drama Theatre and Bayangol Hotel.

**GobiTours & Guesthouse** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 339, 9982 1598; www.gobitours.com; Peace Ave 61, Door 20, Room 25; dm US\$6; 📍) Welcoming and friendly guesthouse but it's a bit small and does get crowded. Very central, it's in the U-shaped white apartment block opposite the post office.

**Nassan's Guest House** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 078, 9919 7466; www.nassantour.com; Baga Toiruu west; dm US\$6, s/d/tr US\$16/18/20; 📍) In the heart of the city, Nassan offers accommodation in one of six apartments spread over one apartment block. Each apartment has kitchen facilities.

**Giel Mongol** (Map p64; ☎ 9977 2960; www.cielmongol.com; Khoroolol 13, Bldg 22-6, Door 5-p; dm US\$7, d without bathroom US\$17; 📍) French-owned guesthouse with clean, nicely decorated rooms. It's hidden among apartment blocks so call ahead for a pick-up.

## HOTELS

There are few hotels to recommend in the budget category and most backpackers wind up at a guesthouse. But if you're set on staying at a proper hotel the following options are doable.

**Mandukhai Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 204; s/d/tr T12,000/18,000/23,000, lux s/d T25,000/40,000) Rooms in the Soviet-era Mandukhai have been renovated with new carpets, drapes and bathrooms but the rambling hallways are still very run-down. Located in the second building west of the Wrestling Palace.

**Hotel Örgöö** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 772; cnr Juulchin Gudamj & Jigjidjavany Gudamj; s/d US\$25/40, ste s/d US\$45/60) Although it's in dire need of renovation, this old dinosaur is still worth mentioning for its central and quiet location. Fine for a night or two at this price.

**Guide House Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 353 582, 353 887; guidehouse@mobinet.mn; Baga Toiruu north; r US\$30, half-lux US\$45, lux US\$60) Between Dashchoilon Khiid and Baga Toiruu, this hidden hotel offers clean and comfortable rooms. Its best feature is its large and modern bathroom, plus the free Swedish breakfast. It's the best pick in this range.

## CAMPING & GER CAMPS

There are no official camping grounds in Ulaanbaatar but you'll find endless patches of grass to pitch a tent on Bogd Khan Uul to the south of the city. Try the valley behind the Zaisan Memorial. The main problem, of course, is what to do with all your stuff during the day; theft is a problem, so you're probably better off going to Gachuurt (p114) or Mandshir Khiid (p109).

**Bogd Khan Ger Camp** (off Map p64; ☎ 9191 9129, 9666 0229, 8811 1292; ger T35,000-45,000, ger without bathroom T12,000-20,000) Sports around 100 gers, some basic with shared bathroom and others decked out with furniture and modern attached bathroom. It's 3km south of the Tuul Gol (behind Zaisan) although there is no regular transport.

## Midrange

Ulaanbaatar is definitely short on decent mid-range hotels but the following are a few reasonable options. Places in this range normally include breakfast.

**Seoul Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 314 507; Peace Ave; s/d US\$30/40, lux s/d US\$50/60; 📍) Although not a family-oriented hotel (it has a striptease bar on the 2nd floor and condom bowls scattered throughout), it's reasonably priced and clean.

**Voyage Hotel** (Map p64; ☎ 327 213; Narny Gudamj; s/d/half-lux/lux US\$30/50/65/90; 📍) Representing good value, the 30-room Voyage has attentive staff and pleasant rooms. Facilities include two restaurants (European and Korean), free internet and sauna. The low price is a reflection of its less than perfect location, on the busy road to the train station.

**Kharaa Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 733; Choimbolyn Gudamj 6; d/half-lux/lux US\$35/45/60; 📍) One of the few hotels in this range to have been renovated with a tasteful, retrained style. Each of the 29 rooms contains a fridge, TV and desk. Views are best from the street side of the building.

**Genex Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 326; www.generalimpex.mn; Choimbolyn Gudamj 10; s/d US\$35/56,

## GER DISTRICT DIGS

As Ulaanbaatar's centre booms with high-rise construction sites and multimillion dollar property developments, its ger (yurt) districts remain trapped in time. By staying in one you'll get a real sense of traditional Mongolian family life, at the same time gaining an appreciation for the difficulties that ger residents must endure. Several tour companies offer walks through ger districts but to achieve the full living experience contact **Rinky Dink Travel Mongolia** (see p81) which can set you up with a homestay in a ger district and place you as a volunteer in its social development projects. A typical stay might include digging a pit toilet, repairing a fence, doing art projects with street kids or teaching English. You'll live like the locals (pit toilets, no running water, difficult transport) but you'll also encounter some of the friendliest people anywhere and gain a perspective on the city that few people encounter. Visits can last between three days to several weeks.

half-lux US\$48/80, lux US\$75/120) Bland but clean rooms overlook a quiet street near Gandan Monastery and Peace Ave. Tacky, pseudo-European atmosphere prevails. The lux rooms are a little odd-looking, with two queen-size beds pushed into a triangular-shaped alcove.

**Zaluuchud Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 594; www.zh.mn; Baga Toiruu 43; s/d/ste incl breakfast US\$35/65/90; 📍) One of Ulaanbaatar's oldest hotels, the Zaluuchud (Young People) has seen renovations that have raised it to the midrange category. Not all the rooms are the same size so you might try asking for an en suite standard, which includes a bedroom and a sitting room with TV. Room 300 is a good choice.

## Top End

All top-end places include breakfast, but often they also include service and government charges of between 10% and 20%. Major credit cards are accepted and reservations are advisable in the peak season, especially around Naadam time. In addition to the following, a Hilton is expected to open its doors in 2008.

**Ulaanbaatar Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 620; http://welcome.to/ubhotel; Baga Toiruu; s US\$60-70, d US\$90, s/d ste US\$90/120, s/d lux US\$120/160; 📍) The Ulaanbaatar Hotel is the grand old dame of Mongolia. Built back in the 1950s, this was where Soviet dignitaries stayed during their visits to UB. It still carries an air of the Khrushchev era with its high ceilings, chandeliers, a marble staircase and a lavish ballroom. The hotel also contains two restaurants, a bar, a travel agency, business centre, sauna and beauty parlour. Amazingly, it also contains a golf practice range.

**Bayangol Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 255; www.bayangolhotel.mn; Chingisiin Örgön Chöölöö 5; s/d US\$76/97, lux US\$142/174, ste US\$252/295; 📍) One of Ulaanbaatar's biggest and most reliable ho-

tels, the Bayangol consists of two 12-storey towers that dominate the skyline south of the Square. Rooms have been renovated and even come with a personal computer, which you can use for work or internet. There is an imported-goods shop here and two excellent restaurants, the Casablanca (for Singaporean food) and the Taj Mahal (for Indian).

**Chinggis Khaan Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 380; www.chinggis-hotel.com; Tokyogiin Gudamj 10; s US\$84, d US\$107-119, s/d half-lux US\$119/144, s/d lux US\$179, ste US\$333; 📍) The Chinggis Khaan is Mongolia's biggest, brashiest hotel. It has all the facilities you could dream of, including indoor pool, travel agent and an attached shopping mall. Rooms are well-appointed and of international four-star standard; choose one that faces west for a view of the Bogd Khan mountain and downtown Ulaanbaatar.

**Khan Palace** (Map p64; ☎ 463 463; www.khanpalace.com; East Cross Rd; s/d US\$98/121, half-lux US\$115/144, lux US\$173/219, ste US\$345-518; 📍) Ulaanbaatar's newest luxury hotel is a Kempinski-managed Japanese-invested venture on the east end of Peace Ave. Rooms are plush, with a tasteful design and little niceties such as humidifier, robes and slippers. The hotel also has free internet, a fitness centre and sauna, but no swimming pool. Expats say the breakfast is the best in town.

**our pick Corporate Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 334 411; www.corporatehotel.mn; Chingisiin Örgön Chöölöö 9-2; s/d US\$140/185, half-lux US\$160/220, lux US\$180/240, ste US\$350/460; 📍) With its slender tower and minimalist design, the Corporate looks like a slice of Tokyo lost in the tangle of Ulaanbaatar's ungainly Soviet architecture. Thanks to the unique design of the building, most rooms are on corners, with windows facing in two directions. It has a restaurant,

sauna, Jacuzzi, fitness room and a spectacular roof-top bar on the 11th floor. This is a great place to come for a drink even if you're not staying here.

Also recommended:

**Puma Imperial** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 043; www.mongolianpumahotel.com; lkh Surguuliin Gudamj; s/tw/d US\$63/100/105; 📍) Popular with visiting journalists and diplomats wanting to be close to the Square. None of the rooms have a particularly good view.

**Continental Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 323 829; www.continentalhotel.ulaanbaatar.net; Olympiin Örgön Chölöö; s/d US\$79/107, half-lux US\$105/132, lux US\$130/168; 📍) This rather incongruous hotel bears a striking resemblance to the White House. Facilities include a small fitness centre, with a charge of US\$9 per hour.

**Narantuul Hotel** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 565; www.narantuulhotel.com; Peace Ave; s/d/tr US\$79/89/99, half-lux s/d/tr US\$109/119/129, lux s/d US\$149/159; 📍) Eye-pleasing rooms have modern but subtle décor, with a few nice touches, such as flat-panel TVs. It has two restaurants, a business centre, sauna and beauty salon.

## EATING

The two best roads for all kinds of restaurants and cafés are Baga Toiruu west and Peace Ave, near the State Department Store.

## Restaurants

Forget everything you've heard about the food in Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar is blanketed with marvellous locally owned bistros and restaurants, and a few top-end places run by Western and Asian expats.

## MONGOLIAN

There has been a small explosion of restaurants serving gourmet Mongolian cuisine, as unlikely as that may sound. Some are the genuine article, serving Mongolian delicacies (various forms of meat and milk combinations) in a pleasant atmosphere. Other places are geared towards the tourist crowd, usually dealing in Mongolian barbecue (the Americanised version of Mongolian food).

**Taliin Mongol** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 451; Juulchin Gudamj; meals T4000-6000; 📍) 9am-midnight) Once you've eaten at this delicious restaurant Mongolian food will never taste the same again. Walk inside to find walls covered with tasteful art and *tamga* (traditional livestock brands used by herders), as well as a miniature felt ger with faux fire and furniture. Start your meal with a 'soup of power' (flavoured with *aarts*, a type of sour whey), and then try any

number of Mongol treats, including grilled yak cheese with yogurt, Buriat pancakes, lamb *khorkhog* (steamed meat), traditional Kazakh horse sausage and even boiled lamb's head! Wash these gourmet delights down with a glass of camel milk or sea buckthorn wine. It's located on the east side of the Mongolian GIA building.

**City Nomads** (Map p64; ☎ 454 484; Peace Ave 16; dishes T4000-8000; 📍 noon-11pm) Upscale Mongolian atmosphere although most of the steak, chicken and fish menu is Western in style and taste. It's attached to the Negdelchin Hotel.

**Nomad Legends Mongols Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 326 631; Sükhbaataryn Gudamj 1; meals T6000-8000; 📍 noon-midnight) A branch of City Nomads, this smaller restaurant-café is a great place to stop for a Mongolian milk tea or plate of not-so-greasy *khuushuur* (fried meat pancake). The décor of contemporary Mongol art looks touristy, but it's quite popular with locals. Both this place and City Nomads are related to the inferior Modern Nomads.

**BD's Mongolian Barbeque** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 191; Seoul St; all-you-can-eat BBQ T7700; 📍 noon-midnight) This is the first American chain restaurant to open a franchise in Mongolia – ironically, it's not American cuisine but Mongolian barbecue. Despite the staged atmosphere, Mongolians seem to like it and it's certainly a filling option if you're half-starved after a countryside trip. Profits from the restaurant go to the Mongolian Youth Development Federation (MYDF).

There are dozens of **Mongolian fast-food restaurants** (*guanzz*) and they can be found on every block in the city. Some are chain restaurants and you'll start to recognise prominent eateries, including Zochin Buuz (Зочин Бууз), Khaan Buuz (Хаан Бууз) and Mongol Khuushuur (Монгол Хуушuur). They serve up industrial-sized *buuz* (steamed mutton dumplings), plus soups and *bifshteks ondogtei* (beefsteak with egg); many of these operate 24 hours. Meals cost T900 to T1500. There is a popular Zochin Buuz (Map pp70-1) on Peace Ave, opposite the Russian embassy, and a nice Khaan Buuz (Map pp70-1) west from the Flower Center on Baga Toiruu west.

## ASIAN

Just about every block in downtown Ulaanbaatar has a Korean barbecue restaurant. And if you don't spot one of those, a Chinese, Japanese or Indian restaurant won't be far

## HOTEL BARS & RESTAURANTS

In most cities, travellers tend to overlook the restaurants and bars set inside hotels, or only eat at the hotel in which they are staying. Ulaanbaatar, however, has a number of excellent restaurants and bars, privately owned and managed, inside the city's top end hotels. The best include:

- Khan Palace: Sakura (below) is an excellent Japanese restaurant. The hotel also offers a quality breakfast buffet complete with omelette chef!
- Chinggis Khaan Hotel (p85): Mr Wang is a good Chinese restaurant.
- Bayangol Hotel (p85): There are two great restaurants in the Casablanca and Taj Mahal (below).
- Puma Imperial (opposite): Delhi Darbar is an Indian restaurant.
- White House Hotel: Strings (p88) is the closest thing Mongolia has to a Hard Rock Café.
- Corporate Hotel (p85): Home to View Lounge, a spectacular roof-top bar.

away. The Korean, Chinese and Japanese script on the signboard is usually covered (an edict issued by a Mongolian nationalist gang called Dayan Mongol), so the signs will be in Cyrillic or English.

**Taj Mahal** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 009; Bayangol Hotel, Tower B, Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö 5; dishes T4000-5000, thali T6000; 📍 noon-midnight) Amiable owner Babu prepares a range of tandoori and North Indian dishes such as *murgh makhni* (butter chicken). The lunchtime *thalli* (set menu) gives you three curries, dhal, salad, rice, bread and dessert. We liked the interior too – the papier-mâché elephant and reconstruction of the Taj Mahal façade adds a nice touch.

**Mokran Pyongyang Restaurant** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9986 9305; cnr Peace Ave & Öndör Geegen Zanabazaryn Gudamj; meals T5000, sushi platter T10,000; 📍 noon-10.30pm) Offers a mix of Japanese and Korean dishes. Sushi is half-price here on weekends but the real reason to come here is to experience the 'Friendship Cultural Centre of North Korea'. There are paintings of North Korea on the walls and you can watch North Korean DVDs while you eat (ask to see the Mass Games DVD). It's a unique chance to speak with the North Koreans who run the place and well-worth visiting if you have an interest in the hermit kingdom.

**Hazara** (Map p64; ☎ 480 214, 9919 5007; Peace Ave 16; dishes T6000-8000; 📍 noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) This North Indian restaurant has been serving up delectable dishes for more than a decade, always with the same winning menu and colourful décor. Each table is covered by a colourful *samiyan* (Rajasthani tent), so it's easy to escape to India for an hour or two while you dine on excellent *murgh makhni*, naan basket and saffron rice. In terms of pure

taste, quality of service, freshness of food and consistency, this is arguably the best restaurant in town. Hazara is located behind the Wrestling Palace.

Other recommendations:

**Ba Shu Restaurant** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 767; cnr Peace Ave & Baruun Selbe Gudamj; dishes T2500) Reasonably priced and central Chinese restaurant.

**City Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 077; cnr Peace Ave & Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; dishes T3800-6000; 📍 10am-11pm; wi-fi) On the 1st floor of the Mongolian Artists' Exhibition Hall, it has some surprisingly good Chinese and Korean dishes.

**Shilla** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9119 2231; Od Plaza, Seoul St; meals T6000-8000) Slick and professional Korean barbecue.

A great place for Japanese is the restaurant **Sakura** (Map p64; Khan Palace Hotel; East Cross Rd; meals T4500-9000). There are a few other hotels with decent Asian restaurants, including a Chinese place at the Chinggis Khaan (p85), another Chinese restaurant in the Ulaanbaatar Hotel (p85) and the Singaporean-styled Casablanca restaurant at the Bayangol Hotel (p85).

## WESTERN

**CCCP** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9927 4740; cnr lkh Surguuliin Gudamj & Zaluuchuudyn Örgön Chölöö; dishes T2500-4000; 📍 11am-midnight) The Beatles song 'Back in the USSR' will spring to mind when you enter this kitsch Soviet time warp. Meals include old Russian favourites such as *pelmeni* (dumpling soup) and borsch, plus other treats from the former Soviet world, such as Georgian stewed meat, Uzbek *manti* (lamb dumplings) and Kyrgyz pancakes. It has a great atmosphere, with pictures of the old Soviet republic capitals, statues of Lenin and covers of old Russian magazines.

**Los Bandidos** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 314 167, 9919 4618; Baga Toiruu north; dishes T4000-5000; ☎ 11.30am-midnight) This place is advertised as 'the only Mexican and Indian restaurant in Mongolia', a claim that we won't try to argue with. It serves nachos, fajitas, enchiladas and burritos, as well as meals hot from the tandoori oven.

**Pizza Della Casa** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 114; Peace Ave; pizzas T4000-6000; ☎ noon-11pm) This longtime favourite dishes up some of Mongolia's best pizzas, pastas and calzone at reasonable prices. The *toon* (tuna) is highly recommended. There are two locations, the Peace Ave one is near the Peace & Friendship Building, and the second is in the Sky Shopping Mall. It has free delivery for orders over T7500.

**Marco Polo** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 318 433; Seoul St 27; pizzas T4500-6500; ☎ 11am-midnight) The place has brick-oven pizza that is considered by many to be the best in town. The décor is a bit odd – a mix of European ambience plus Mongolian antiques, *tsam* masks and the odd mastodon tusk thrown in for good measure. Try not to let the kiddies wander off unaccompanied, Ulaanbaatar's most notorious strip club is right upstairs!

**Millie's Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 338; Marco Polo Bldg; lunch mains T5000, dinner mains T12,000; ☎ 9am-4pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat) Drop by Millie's at noon any day of the week and you'll find the place packed with consultants, aid workers and journalists sipping excellent shakes and gobbling steak sandwiches and lemon pie. The restaurant completely changes for dinner time; tablecloths are spread out, candles are lit and a gourmet menu appears. Dinner is a fusion of Mediterranean, Cuban and South African cuisines; presentation is perfect and taste impeccable.

**Le Bistro Français** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 022; Ikh Surguuliin Gudamj 2; pasta T5000, meat dishes T9000-15,000; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat & Sun) The soft lighting, cream-coloured walls and French art give this bistro a peaceful, romantic ambience. Having settled in, enjoy a starter of Burgundy snails followed by a Chateaubriand flambé with cognac, washed down with a French red wine. We were a bit disappointed with the pastas, but the meat dishes are highly recommended. Ice cream and crepe desserts are excellent.

**our pick Veranda** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 818; Jamyn Gunii Gudamj 5/1; mains T6000-8000; ☎ noon-midnight) One of the most popular places in town, this Italian restaurant excels at meat dishes, such

as a nice lamb roll with blackcurrant sauce on a bed of greens. The house speciality is the Veranda, a tender, flavourful grilled beef tenderloin that goes well with one of the Italian wines on offer. The atmosphere is very comfortable; rather than chairs you sit on couches, and there are fine views of the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum.

**Strings** (Map pp64; ☎ 365 158; Damdinbazaryn Gudamj; dishes T6500-10,500; ☎ noon-midnight) One of the most popular places in town, thanks largely to the in-house rock band from the Philippines. Moneyed expatriates from the US favour the place – the Hard Rock Café atmosphere provides a taste of home. For a filling meal try the fajitas, the Hawaiian pork stir-fry or a teriyaki chicken sandwich.

**Silk Road Bar & Grill** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 318 864, 9191 0211; Jamyn Gunii Gudamj 5/1; meal with drink T7500; ☎ 12.30-11pm) Owner and chef Enkhee (aka Eddie) is Mongolia's original restaurateur. Silk Road, his third restaurant, features lots of cosy couches and bas-relief scenes of the ancient Silk Road from China to Europe. The menu reflects the name of the place, and you'll find sprinklings of Indian, Central Asian and Mediterranean treats, including shish kebabs, chicken tikka and pork *gyros* (pitta with meat and vegetables). You can try a sampling of these at the Sunday smorgasbord (between 12.30pm and 3pm).

**California** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 031; Seoul St; meal with drink T9000; ☎ 8am-midnight) One of Ulaanbaatar's most popular restaurants, this place has an array of eclectic menu items, including a Thai steak salad with Caesar dressing, authentic chicken tacos and *shorlog* (shish kebab with cream sauce). All of these are recommended. There is a huge variety of food to choose from and the portions are generous and heavy on the calories (this place is a real diet killer). It's also one of the few places in town that is open for breakfast.

Other recommendations:

**Ala Turka** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9900 5341; Peace Ave; dishes T2000-4500; ☎ 10am-midnight) Filling platters of Turkish food. If you want dinner kebab, arrive before 7pm because they usually run out.

**El Latino** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 051; Peace Ave 3; dishes T2500-4000; ☎ 11am-10pm) Cuban restaurant with colourful décor. However, the chef is from Belarus so there are also some tasty Russian dishes.

**UB Deli** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 325 240; Seoul St 48; mains T3500-5000; ☎ 10am-9pm) American-owned restaurant that specialises in big sandwiches, including Philly cheese and grilled reuben. It delivers for a small fee.

**Emerald Bay** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 120; Tserendorjiin Gudamj; mains T6000-10,000) Excellent Mediterranean menu includes pork *gyros* (T6500) and grilled salmon (T10,000). Vegetarians should be able to find a salad or soup to their liking.

**Bonito** (Map pp64; ☎ 9909 1421; Namyanjugiin Gudamj; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat & Sun) For T12,000 you get an all-you-can-eat feed of Brazilian meats, soups and salads. It also serves wine and excellent cocktails.

## Brew Pubs

The following establishments fall under the categories of restaurant and bar. You can enjoy excellent food (and they are kid-friendly too), but by late evening they cater mainly towards a drinking crowd.

**Ikh Mongol** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 305 014; Seoul St; meal with beer T6000-8000; ☎ noon-midnight) The flagship restaurant for APU, one of Mongolia's largest food and alcohol producers, Ikh Mongol doles out huge platters of grilled meat and jugs of beer. Needless to say, it's not a great place for calorie-watchers. There is daily live music (10pm) and a large beer patio built on two levels. It's on the east side of the State Circus.

**Chinggis Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 325 820; Sükhbaataryn Gudamj 10; large beer T1800, meal with beer T6000-8000; ☎ 10am-midnight) Microbrewery serving some of the best beer in the country. There's also a filling meat-and-potatoes menu designed by a German chef.

**Khan Brau** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 067; Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; meal with beer T6000-8000; ☎ 11am-midnight) Popular European-run place in the city centre, the porch attracts a good crowd in summer. There is live music from Tuesday to Saturday.

**Grand Khaan Irish Pub** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 336 666; Seoul St; meal with beer T7000; ☎ 11am-midnight; wi-fi) Big crowds, lots of smoke, free-flowing beer and loud music set the scene for Ulaanbaatar's most popular night spot. The pub-grub menu includes an array of salads. An attached café (open 8am to 10pm) serves espressos, cappuccinos and croissants, plus English and German breakfasts.

**Brau Haus** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 490 071; Seoul St; meal with beer T8000; ☎ 11am-midnight) 'Two slices of crusty pork roast' and 'one whole pork knuckle' may not sound like the most appetizing menu items, but rest assured this brew pub can serve up some tasty dishes to go with tall glasses of beer. The bar has an attractive, airy layout, made more interesting with some B&W photos of old Ulaanbaatar. It has live music on Friday.

## Cafés

In summer, most restaurants disgorge deck chairs and tables to the pavements, forming an excellent café culture where you can sip a coffee or Coke and watch Ulaanbaatar go about its business.

**Sacher's Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 734; Baga Toiruu west; snacks T500-2000, light meals T3000; ☎ 9am-9pm) Mongolia's first genuine bakery, this German-owned operation doles out filter coffee, pretzels, pastries and excellent fresh bread. It has a nice outdoor patio, where you can enjoy reading the local English newspapers or imported German magazines. The menu includes hot soups and sandwiches.

**our pick Michele's French Bakery** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9916 9970; items T750-4100; ☎ 8am-8pm; wi-fi) A popular haunt among savvy Ulaanbaatar expatriates, this bakery and coffee shop serves an array of reasonably priced treats, including apple strudel (T750) and chocolate croissants (T800). You can also enjoy panini sandwiches (T2200) and crepes (T2200 to T4100) while listening to a great music playlist. Coffee and other hot drinks are available; no alcohol is served but the owner Alex allows you to bring in a bottle of wine or beer to round off your meal.

**Stupa Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 953; Builder's Sq, Juulchin Gudamj; snacks T1500-2000; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) This very charming café is decked out with orange ger furniture and photos of camel trains. It also has a shelf full of English-language books and magazines, which you can read while enjoying a sandwich, coffee or tea (you can also check the books out against a deposit). It's also a great place if you have kids as there are toys to keep tots occupied. Ask about seasonal treats; in late summer you can buy Khövsgöl berries mixed with *tarag* (yogurt). It's part of the FPMT Buddhist centre and profits go towards supporting the restoration of Buddhism in Mongolia.

**Café Amsterdam** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 979; cnr Peace Ave & Baruun Selbe Gudamj; items T1500-3000; ☎ 7am-midnight; wi-fi) At the time of writing this place was set to open as Mongolia's first literary café. The Dutch owners have promised café au lait, pannekoeken (crepes) and homemade cheese (in season), as well as shelves of books that you can borrow, trade or buy. Poetry readings and guest speakers are expected so check the chalkboard for upcoming events.

**Narya Café** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 317 098, 9911 1361; Builder's Sq, Juulchin Gudamj; sandwiches T2500-3500;

☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun; wi-fi) The Latin music playing in the background, ochre-painted walls and contemporary artwork make for a pleasant sight when entering this laid-back café. The menu offers reasonably priced sandwiches, soups and home-baked muffins, plus hot dishes such as a 'sloppy dorj' (the Mongolian version of a sloppy joe). Food quality can be inconsistent.

**Ananda Café & Meditation Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 316 986; Baga Toiruu west; meals T3000; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) Enjoy herbal teas and some excellent vegetarian dishes made from rice, buckwheat, tofu, lentils and other natural products. Vegetarian *buuz* and *khuushuur* are also available. Profits from the café go to supporting a local orphanage, the Lotus Children's Centre, and as the name suggests, yoga classes are available, as are vegetarian cooking classes.

**Chez Bernard** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 8810 0135; Peace Ave 27; dishes T4000-6000; ☎ 9am-8pm) The most popular backpacker hangout in Ulaanbaatar, this Belgian-owned café has European breakfast platters crammed with fruit, cheese, yogurt, eggs, bacon and toast. Food quality is somewhat hit-and-miss and the bakery items are overpriced (T1500 to T2500), but the place does have atmosphere, especially in summer when you can sit on the deck. There's a noticeboard for organising trips to the countryside or swapping used books. It also sells new and used camping gear.

### Quick Eats

For something really quick and filling, order some shashlik (meat kebabs), usually served with onions and cucumber, from any number of street Uzbek vendors (June to August only). The best ones are next to the State Department Store or at City Café (p87). For *buuz*, *khuushuur* or other cheap Mongolian favourites try a *guanz* (canteen or fast-food restaurant; see p86); the Khan Buuz opposite the State Department Store is one example. There are also a few *guanz* on Baga Toiruu west opposite MIAT.

**Soyolj** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 5015 1060; Baga Toiruu; dishes T200-500; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri) Serves warm tofu, freshly pressed soy milk, soups and an array of pint-sized salads. It's a great place for vegetarians tired of trying to de-mutton their *buuz*. It's one building past the Zaluuchuud Hotel, heading northwest.

**Berlin** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 505; cnr Baruun Selbe Gudamj & Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö; meals T1500; ☎ 9am-

9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun) An old stand-by, this cafeteria-style place has good-value burgers and spaghetti. Long lines form during lunch hour.

**Indra** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 323 769; Jigjidjavanyin Gudamj 9; meals T1500-2000; ☎ 9am-9pm) Located just off the Square, this popular eatery, housed in a converted basketball court, serves decent pasta, *ramen* (Japanese egg noodles), salad and pizzas.

### Self-Catering

These days there are very few things you can't get in the city if you look hard enough, though you may have to visit several markets to track them down. Most markets are open from about 10am to 8pm daily. There are also several shops that specialise in items imported from the US; try the 1st floor of the Nayra Café (p89) or the 2nd floor of Ayanchin Outfitters (p94), both of which stock rare treats such as Snapple and Arizona Iced Tea.

**Container Market** (Map pp70-1; Bömbögör market; Ikh Toiruu west; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) This is the cheapest place for everyday food purchases. Half the market burned down in 2006 but there are plans to rebuild and expand. It's just south of Bakula Rinpoche Süm.

**Minii Delguur & Merkuri Markets** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Merkuri (Мэркури) is sort of a flea market for food where you can bargain with individual vendors for all manner of imported goods, meat, cheese and vegetables, as well as luxuries such as caviar and crab sticks. It's around the back of Minii Delguur (also known as Dalai Eej), a more standard form of supermarket off Tserendorjiin Gudamj.

**Werner's Deli** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 5515 1419; Passage Market; ☎ 10am-7pm Sun-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) Genuine German deli serving all cold cuts and sandwiches. Werner's is located at the back of the Passage Market (the same complex as Minii Delguur and Merkuri Market).

**State Department Store** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave 44) The 1st floor towards the back has a very good selection of fruit, deli and imported goods, though at slightly higher prices than elsewhere.

### DRINKING

Although vodka remains the drink of choice in the countryside, most Ulaanbaatarites prefer beer these days. There are many good,

clean and safe watering holes in the downtown area and while there is no bar district, they are still close enough to put together some semblance of a pub crawl. Many imported beers are available, but the brand of choice is the locally brewed Chinggis, which comes in green cans or on tap. City regulations require that bars close at midnight, after which time you can continue drinking at a nightclub. *Airag* (*koumiss*; fermented mare milk) is available on sidewalk gers in summer, usually after Naadam. Besides the places following, try the brew pubs (p89) or enjoy a drink at one of the open-air beer and shashlik stands that open in summer near the State Department Store.

**Dave's Place** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9979 8185; mongoliadave@yahoo.com; wi-fi) This bar on the patio of the Palace of Culture near the Square offers the popular Thursday 'Quiz Night', starting at 8.30pm. Winners receive a jar of cash and free beer. In cool weather the whole operation retreats to a speakeasy-style bar in the basement. It was closed at the time of research but will hopefully be re-opened.

**Dublin** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 626; Seoul St) With a cosy atmosphere, cream-coloured walls and dark wood finish, Dublin does a fine job of transplanting a bit of Ireland to the steppes. It's a popular expat hangout (especially for miners), but also frequented by young Mongolians. There is plenty of alcohol on tap, as well as Irish coffee and tasty pub grub. With one day's advance notice you can order the leg of lamb, pan-fried in whiskey sauce (for four to six people, T56,000).

**Level** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 334 444; Peace Ave; cocktails T2500-5000) Chic bar and restaurant that fuses nouveau Japanese décor with bits of England (telephone box) and Mongolia (ancient Buddhist block prints behind glass). All manner of drinks are served, plus a selection of appetizers and main items, including a mixed meat platter for four people. It's in the 1st floor of an orange apartment, behind the Peace & Friendship Building.

**Detroit** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 033; Seoul St; ☎ 6pm-2am) This US-inspired bar takes its theme from the Motor City, with photos on the walls of professional sports from Detroit. It has a foosball table and sports teams from Detroit on the TV for homesick Americans. Besides alcohol, you can order burgers, fries and sandwiches. Live music is staged on Friday at 10pm. It's under BD's Mongolian Barbeque.

Other recommendations:

**Crystal Lounge** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave; cocktails T3500-6000; ☎ 6pm-midnight) The stunning white-on-white décor and bubbling water in the walls makes for a mystifying experience, like stepping into a scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It serves cocktails only.

**Greenland** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave; beer T1000-1800; ☎ noon-midnight Jun-Aug) Oktoberfest-style tent, opposite Sükhbaatar Sq. It's open in summer only.

**UB Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 8800 3639; Juulchin Gudamj) Grungy student club with mismatched furniture, foosball, billiards and darts.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Culture vultures will want to check the weekly English-language *UB Post* or *Mongol Messenger* for events. The **Arts Council of Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 015; www.artscouncil.mn) produces a monthly cultural events calendar, which covers most theatres, galleries and museums. You can pick up a brochure at hotel lobbies or the MIAT office. Theatres and galleries sometimes post English ads outside or you could just buy a ticket and hope for the best.

### Theatre

#### TRADITIONAL MUSIC & DANCE

A performance of traditional music and dance will be one of the highlights of your visit to Mongolia and should not be missed. You'll see outstanding examples of the unique Mongolian throat-singing, known as *khöömii*; full-scale orchestral renditions of new and old Mongolian music; contortionists guaranteed to make your eyes water; traditional and modern dancing; and recitals featuring the unique horse-head violin, the *morin khuur*.

The Tumen Ekh Song & Dance Ensemble at the **State Youth & Children's Theatre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9666 4374, 9665 0711; Nairamdal Park; admission T6000, photos T3000, video T10,000; ☎ 6pm May-Oct) is the most popular cultural show in town, featuring traditional singers, dancers and contortionists. It's a great chance to hear *khöömii* and see some fabulous costumes. You can buy CDs (T20,000) of the performance after the show. There is a café and gallery in the traditional-style hall. The Khatan Ekh National Song & Dance Group at **Discovery Mongolia Information Centre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 330 778, 9929 9918; Naryn Gudamj; admission US\$6; ☎ 6pm May-Oct) is similar.

The Moonstone Song & Dance Ensemble at **Tsuki House** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 318 802; admission T7000, photos US\$5, video US\$10; ☎ 2pm, 4pm, 6pm & 8pm May-Oct)

puts on a Mongolian cabaret. You get the lot: contortionists, throat singers, musicians, *tsam* mask dancers and an electrifying shaman dance done in contemporary fashion. One drink is included in the price of the ticket and food is available. Tsuki House is the modern glass building next to the Circus (on the north side).

The **Mongolian National Song & Dance Ensemble** ([www.mon-ensemble.mn](http://www.mon-ensemble.mn)) puts on performances for tourists throughout the summer in the **National Academic Drama Theatre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 621; cnr Seoul St & Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; admission T7000; 🕒 6pm). Shows are less frequently staged at the **Palace of Culture** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 321 444) on the northeast corner of Sükhbaatar Sq.

You can also see traditional song and dance at the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum (see p75) in summer at 5pm.

### OPERA & BALLET

Built by the Russians in 1932, the **State Opera & Ballet Theatre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 854, 9919 4570; admission T5000-8000; 🕒 closed August) is the salmon-pinkish building on the southeast corner of Sükhbaatar Sq. On Saturday and Sunday evenings throughout the year, and sometimes also on weekend afternoons in the summer, the theatre holds stirring opera (in Mongolian) and ballet shows.

One of the best local operas is *Three Fateful Hills* – sometimes known as the *Story of Three Lives* – by Mongolia's most famous poet and playwright, D Natsagdorj. The debut performance of *Chinggis Khaan*, by B Sharav, was shown in 2003. Another recommended opera is *Uran Khas*, written by J Chuluun. Other productions include an exhilarating (but long) rendition of *Carmen*, plus plenty of Puccini and Tchaikovsky.

A board outside the theatre lists the shows for the current month in English. Advance purchase is worthwhile for popular shows because tickets are numbered, so it's possible to score a good seat if you book early. The box office is open 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm Wednesday to Sunday.

### DRAMA

**National Academic Drama Theatre** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 324 621, 9908 1178; cnr Seoul St & Chingisiin Örgön Chölöö; admission T7000; 🕒 ticket sales 10am-7pm) During most of the year, this large, fire-engine-red theatre shows one of a dozen or so Mongolian-language productions which are penned by, among others, William Shakespeare and Jean-

Paul Sartre, as well as various Mongolian playwrights. There are only between six and 10 performances every month, and schedules are sporadic. Check show listings in the *UB Post*. You can buy tickets in advance at the booking office, which is on the right-hand side of the theatre.

On the left-hand side of the theatre, as you approach it from the road, is a door that leads to a **puppet theatre** (☎ 323 959; adult/child T1000/500; 🕒 2.30pm Sat & Sun), which is great if you are travelling with children.

### Nightclubs

Ulaanbaatar has a lively nightlife that has matured in recent years – you can experience everything from small jazz bars and cocktail lounges to gargantuan dance halls and the odd strip club. Places go out of fashion pretty quickly, so you'll need to ask the locals about what is popular.

**Metropolis** (Map p64; ☎ 9973 0569; Sky Shopping Centre; admission T5000; 🕒 8pm-4am) The most stylish place in Ulaanbaatar, Metropolis has a large dance floor and a VIP voyeur terrace. The French-Cambodian DJ plays an eclectic mix of disco, salsa, pop, rock and techno. Monday and Tuesday are reserved for electronica. Drinks go for T4000 to T6000. It's set inside a large vault next to the entrance to the Sky Shopping Mall.

**Oasis** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 719, 9973 31222; Seoul St; admission T4000; 🕒 6pm-late) Oasis attracts a mixed crowd of expats, travellers and Mongolians. There is an outdoor patio area where you can order food off the grill. It's tucked off Seoul St behind a supermarket.

**Face Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 961; Juulchin Gudamj; men/women Sat-Thu T3000/1000, Fri T5000/3000; 🕒 7pm-3am) The Face Club is a lively little place with a Tahitian theme. It has live bands and DJs.

**Hollywood** (Map p64; ☎ 9927 7370; Academich Sodnomyin Gudamj; admission free; 🕒 8pm-late) This throbbing nightclub, with DJ and elevated dance floor, is just past Dashchoilon Khiid. Friday carries a T1000 cover charge.

**Muse** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 601; Maral Tavern Bldg, Baga Toiruu; admission free; 🕒 8pm-late) One of the top nightclubs for the yuppie crowd, it's located just north of the Zaluuchud Hotel.

**Zouq** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 8811 9687; Peace Ave; admission T3000; 🕒 9pm-late Mon-Sat) Egyptian-themed disco with a catwalk dance floor, voyeur terrace and lots of bizarrely-shaped furniture. It's opposite the Square, next to the Greenland tent.

**Silence** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 7011 0020; Sambugiin Örgön Chölöö; admission T5000; 🕒 10pm-4am Mon-Sat) Multilevel dance club with blood-red lights igniting the bar and waiters that can't keep track of your tab. The place gets going after 1am and the DJ plays mainly trance music.

**Imuss** (Map p64; ☎ 9981 8181; Peace Ave; 🕒 2pm-2am) The centrepiece of this multilevel club is a 7m-tall statue of Joseph Stalin, which once stood in front of the National Library. Even if you are not into nightclubs this slice of retro Soviet chic is a must-see.

### Live Music

**History Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 732; [www.mongoliahistorytravel.com](http://www.mongoliahistorytravel.com); Juulchin Gudamj; 🕒 noon-midnight) This restaurant and bar is popular with the locals and hosts traditional Mongolian music acts. The band that usually performs here is Legend, a five-piece group that plays contemporary music with traditional instruments. The band usually performs Monday to Friday at 8pm but its schedule changes frequently so you'll need to call ahead to find out when it's on. There is also karaoke, dancing and skilfully prepared Mongolian cuisine. Look for the ger sticking out of the side of the building.

**River Sounds** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 497; Olympiin Örgön Chölöö; admission T5000; 🕒 8pm-3am) This is one of the best places to hear music as it's a dedicated live-music venue with jazz bands and the occasional indie rock band.

Another popular place is Strings (p88), which has a house band playing classic rock covers. A few brew houses and bars also have live music, including the Brau Haus (p89) Detroit (p91) and Grand Khaan (p89) on Fridays, and Khan Brau (p89), from Tuesday to Saturday.

### Cinema

**Tengis** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 326 575; [www.tengis.mn](http://www.tengis.mn); Liberty Sq; regular show T2500, matinee T1500) Air-conditioned halls, comfortable seats (with cup holders!) and a modern projection system make this theatre a very worthwhile experience. It usually has one or two Hollywood blockbusters (in English, subtitled with Mongolian) and a Korean or Mongolian film.

### Gay & Lesbian Venues

There are no dedicated gay bars as such but some members of the gay community will meet at one place or another for a few weeks and then move on. Attitudes towards gays

are loosening up a little but it's better to err on the side of discretion when asking about meeting places.

### Circus

**State Circus** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 795) In the recognisable round building with the blue roof at the end of Tserendorjiin Gudamj. There are usually a variety of acts including acrobatics and juggling, and extraordinary contortionists, but it was closed for renovations at the time of research.

### Sport

The annual Naadam features wrestling, horse racing and archery; see boxed text, p96, for more details. In the lead-up to Naadam, you should be able to catch some informal, but still competitive, wrestling at the Naadam Stadium. For wrestling at other times of the year check out the schedule at the **Wrestling Palace** (Map p64; ☎ 456 443; Peace Ave; admission T1000-5000), which is the ger-shaped building south of the Chinggis Khaan Hotel. Wrestling and basketball are also held at the **Central Sports Palace** (Map pp70-1; Baga Toiruu) during the year.

On weekends during the short summer (but not around the time of the Naadam), the Mongolian Football League plays football (soccer) matches at a **football pitch** (Map p64) just south of the Naadam Stadium.

### SHOPPING

After decades of dollar shops, ration tickets and a general milieu of nonproductivity, capitalism has come to Ulaanbaatar with a vengeance. Some higher-end places accept credit cards but cash is still king in most places of business.

### Camping Gear & Tools

Besides the following, there is a decent camping section on the 3rd floor of the State Department Store. Be well aware that Western-quality camping gear is not cheap in Mongolia so you may want to bring stuff from home. Cheap Chinese-made products are available if you're desperate, though most of it breaks down before you even leave the city.

**Seven Summits** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 329 456; [www.activemongolia.com/7summits](http://www.activemongolia.com/7summits); btwn Peace Ave & Seoul St; 🕒 10am-7pm) Stocks German-made Vaude gear, GPS units, maps, travel books and accessories. It also hires out gear, including tents, sleeping



bags, gas stoves, mountain bikes (US\$16 per day) and inflatable kayaks (US\$25 for one day, US\$45 for two days). It's opposite the CPO.

**Ayanchin Outfitters** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 211; www.ayanchin.com; Seou St 21) This place sells Western camping, fishing and hunting equipment, plus GPS units, mainly imported from the US.

**Pro Shack** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 318 138, 9911 4438; lkh Toiruu 6) If you need tools for a self-organised jeep/motorcycle trip or a generator big enough to power a Mongolian village, drop by this German-owned hardware outlet. The shop will move in 2009 so call for its new location.

**Northland** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 9918 0001; Peace Ave 62; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Mon) Sells fishing tackle and Chinese-brand (but acceptable quality) camping gear at reasonable prices.

**Shonkhor Saddles** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 311 218, 9191 1190; jturuu@yahoo.com) Produces and sells saddles and other horse paraphernalia. The workshop is behind School No 5 on Baga Toiruu but is difficult to find on your own – contact the owners at the internet centre opposite the German embassy. Ask for Tomor or Nara.

## Antiques

The antique trade is booming in Mongolia, but you need to be careful about what you buy as some of it is illegal. Make sure the shop you buy it from can produce a certificate of authenticity.

**Amarbayasgalant Antique** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 310 000; Juulchin Gudamj 37/31; ☎ 9am-7pm) A quality shop for the serious buyer, it sells enormous sutras, traditional headdress, Buddhist statues and other rare items. Some of the items are creations of Zanabazar and not for sale. Great for browsing.

Other shops offering a good selection:

**Eternal Art Antique Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 369 704; Sükhbaatarin Gudamj 1) One of the premier antique shops in the city. Credit cards are accepted.

**Nomads Culture Antique Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 333 939; Juulchin Gudamj 35; ☎ 10am-7pm) Smaller shop opposite Amarbayasgalant.

## Musical Instruments

Traditional musical instruments make perfect gifts for friends who are musically inclined. The *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle) is particularly nice as a piece of decorative art (and Mongolians consider it good luck to have one in the home). **Argasan** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 336 565; Partizan Gudamj 48; ☎ 10am-6pm) is a *morin khuur* workshop near Aeroflot. Other instruments are available

at the **Egshiglen Magnai National Musical Instrument Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 419; Sükhbaatarin Gudamj), on the east side of the Museum of Natural History. *Morin khuur* range from T100,000 to T450,000, and there are also *yatlag* (zithers) and two-stringed Chinese fiddles.

## Cashmere

The major cashmere and wool factories are Goyo (Mongolian-American joint venture), Gobi Cashmere (government-owned) and Buyan (owned by the prominent politician Jargalsaikhan). Excellent products can be purchased at the **Gobi Cashmere shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 326 867; Peace Ave; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Sat) opposite the Russian embassy. The State Department Store has cashmere on the 2nd and 5th floors. Tserendorjiin Gudamj, between the State Circus and the State Department Store, has around a dozen fashion shops.

## Fine Art

Contemporary Mongolian artwork can be purchased at a small number of galleries around town. For more information see the section on art galleries (p73).

## Crafts & Souvenirs

Souvenir shops are found absolutely everywhere in Ulaanbaatar – just toss a stone in the air and chances are you'll hit one. You can pick up cheap and authentic gifts such as landscape paintings, wool slippers, Mongolian jackets and felt dolls. There is also a lot of kitsch, such as Chinggis Khaan T-shirts and key chains. On the streets you will undoubtedly encounter amateur artists selling watercolours for under US\$1.

The biggest souvenir outlet is on the 5th floor of the State Department Store. You'll also spot shops inside gers mounted on carts, notably outside the Bayangol Hotel and National Museum of Mongolian History.

Felt carpets produced by a women's cooperative in Khovd are sold at Sacher's Café (see p89).

The best contemporary artwork in the country is on sale in the **Red Ger Art Gallery** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 015) inside the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts (p69); it's open during museum hours.

Other shops to try include the following: **Möngön Zaviya** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave; ☎ 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7.30pm Sat & Sun) Great for picking up silver cups, belt buckles and jewellery.

**Souvenir House** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 398; cnr Peace Ave & Khaddorjiin Gudamj) One of the largest souvenir shops in town.

**Tsagaan Alt Wool Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 318 591; Tserendorjiin Gudamj) This nonprofit store, which sends money directly back to the craftspeople, has all manner of wool products, including toys, clothes and artwork. It's Christian-run, in case you were wondering about those Jesus Christ felt tapestries.

## Market

**Naran Tuul market** (Наран Туул Зах; off Map p64; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Mon), east of the centre, is also known as the Black Market (Khar Zakh), but it's not the sort of place where you go to change money illegally and smuggle goods – though this certainly happens.

The market is huge, one of the biggest in Asia and in summer up to 60,000 people a day squeeze inside. There's a T50 entrance fee. You can buy cheap gear for a camping trip, among other things, but the real reason to visit is to marvel at this enormous emporium.

An undercover area has a decent selection of clothes, such as bags, leather boots and fake North Face jackets. This is also one of the cheapest places to get traditional Mongolian clothes such as a *del* (T35,000) and jacket (T30,000). Towards the back of the market you'll find saddles, riding tack and all the ingredients needed to build your own ger. The back area is also where you'll find antique and coin dealers, but they don't issue any official documentation (unlike the antique shops in town), making it illegal to export. New items, such as the snuff bottles (made in China anyway), can be purchased without worry.

The market is notorious for pickpockets and bag slashers so don't bring anything you don't want to lose. Don't carry anything on your back, and strap your money belt to your body. If you feel a group of men blocking your way from the front, chances are their friends are probing your pockets from behind.

A taxi to the market should cost about T1000 from the centre of town. Minibuses come here from Peace Ave (look for the sign '3ax'). To walk from the Square will take about 45 minutes. Try to avoid Saturday and Sunday afternoons, when the crowds can be horrendous.

## Photography

There are several places to purchase cameras and camera equipment. The best are the

**Canon Showroom** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 8811 7444; Peace Ave) and the **Mon Nip Camera Shop** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 315 838; Peace Ave 30). Photo-developing studios are everywhere, including the State Department Store; we like the **Fuji Film** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 328 554; M-100 Bldg, Juulchin Gudamj; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun), northwest of Sükhbaatar Sq.

## Electronics

Techie travellers will find joy at **Computerland** (Map pp70-1; Peace Ave; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) a three-storey building crammed with dozens of private dealers selling everything from flash drives to the latest laptops. It is located behind the Canon Showroom (left), which also has a computer shop.

## Shopping Centres

Known as *ikh delguur* or 'big shop', the **State Department Store** (Их Дэлгүүр; Map pp70-1; ☎ 319 292; Peace Ave 44; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) is virtually a tourist attraction in itself, with the best products from around the city squeezed into one building.

The 1st floor has a supermarket at the back. The 2nd floor has outlets for clothing, cashmere and leather goods. The 3rd floor has electronics, a Mobicom shop, CDs, books, sports equipment, camping and fishing gear. The 5th floor has a great collection of souvenirs, traditional clothing, maps and books about Mongolia.

Foreign-exchange counters are found on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th floors, with only cash changed. The store also sells phone and internet cards.

If you are based on the east side of town, the **Sky Shopping Centre** (Map p64; ☎ 319 090; ☎ 10.30am-9pm) may be more convenient than the State Department Store and offers similar goods and services. It's behind the Chinggis Khaan Hotel.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Chinggis Khaan International Airport is 18km southwest of the city. You can change money at a branch of the T&D Bank. There's also a post office and internet access for T50 per minute. A tourist booth opens when planes arrive.

Mongolia has three domestic carriers: MIAT, AeroMongolia and EZ Nis. The former two both have international connections with Ulaanbaatar. Note that on domestic routes

## THE NAADAM

Mongolia's penchant for war games comes to a head each summer on the vast grasslands, where competitors show off their skills in wrestling, archery and horse racing. The annual Naadam Festival is the much anticipated culmination of these events, and a colourful spectacle enjoyed by locals and tourists alike.

Every village and city has a naadam; most (including the one in Ulaanbaatar) are held on 11 and 12 July, coinciding with Independence Day. Some rural naadams are held a few days before or after this date so some planning is required if you want to see one.

For travellers, rural naadams provide the opportunity to see genuine traditions and events not tarted up for the sake of tourism. You'll get closer to the action and may even be asked to make up the numbers during the wrestling tournament!

The Ulaanbaatar Naadam, by comparison, has all the trappings of a tourist holiday, with cheesy carnival events and souvenir salesmen outside the stadium. The horse racing is also quite far from the city and because the city swells with foreign tourists at this time, you can feel like a sheep being herded around with them. The main benefit of Ulaanbaatar Naadam is that the city takes on a very relaxed mood, and there are plenty of associated concerts and theatre events. While we recommend seeing a *sum*-level naadam, many tourists will do the festival in UB. If this includes you, keep reading.

Day one of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam starts at about 9.30am when an honour guard marches into the Parliament (Government) House to collect the nine yak-tail banners that will be brought to the stadium. Usually they exit the Parliament House from the backside.

The opening ceremony, which starts at about 11am at the **Naadam Stadium** (Map p64), includes an impressive march of monks and athletes, plus song and dance routines. By comparison, almost nothing happens at the closing ceremony. The winning wrestler is awarded, the ceremonial yak banners are marched away, and everyone goes home. It is held at about 7pm on the second day, but the exact time depends on when the wrestling finishes.

with MIAT and Aero Mongolia you can carry 15kg but EZ Nis allows 20kg. You'll pay around T1500 per kilogram over the limit. For details of international flights to Ulaanbaatar, see p266. Flight days always change so check updated schedules. The airlines accept credit cards for international and domestic flights. If paying cash, foreigners are supposed to use US dollars only.

**Aero Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 283 029; www.aeromongolia.mn; MPRP Bldg; ✈ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) is inside the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) headquarters of the Square, next to the Ulaanbaatar Hotel.

**Blue Sky Aviation** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 312 085; www.blueskyaviation.mn; Peace Ave) has one nine-seat Cessna 208 aeroplane available for charter flights. The office is in the same building as Seven Summits, opposite the post office.

**EZ Nis** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 313 689; www.eznis.com; 8 Zovkhis Bldg; ✈ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) is the newest airline in the country and has an office is on Seoul St.

The head office of **MIAT** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 322 118, 1881; www.miat.com; ✈ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) is on Baga Toiruu west, near the Trade &

Development Bank. It is the cheapest airline in Mongolia.

Foreign airline offices include the following:

**Aeroflot** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 320 720; www.aeroflot.ru; Seoul St 15; ✈ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) US dollars and credit cards are accepted.

**Air China** (Map p64; ☎ 328 838, 452 548; www.fly-airchina.com; Ikh Toiruu Bldg 47; ✈ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Located on Big Ring Rd in the northeast of town.

**Korean Air** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 326 643, fax 320 602; www.koreanair.com; 2nd fl, Chinggis Khaan Hotel; ✈ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Payment in US dollars and tögrög.

**United Airlines** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 323 232; www.united.com; info@airtrans.mn; Air Trans office, Sükhbaatarын Gudamj 1; ✈ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Handy for booking flights out of Seoul and Beijing.

## Bus

Two stations handle most bus traffic. The eastern depot, **Bayanzürkh Avto Vaksal** (off Map p64; ☎ 463 386), is 6km east of Sükhbaatar Sq. The station has daily buses to Choibalsan (T15,800, 13 hours), Baruun-Urt (T13,800, 11 hours), Öndörkhан (T7500, five hours) and

Archery is held in an open **archery stadium** (Map p64) next to the main stadium but the horse racing is held about 40km west of the city on an open plain called Hui Doloon Khutag. Buses and minivans go there from the Naadam Stadium for around T1000 (vehicles also depart from the Dragon bus stand). Otherwise, most guesthouses organise transport for around US\$8 (also inquire at Chez Bernard, p90) or you could just hail a cab and pay the local rate.

A unique way to experience Naadam is to camp out at the horse race area, which will give you some insight into the rigorous lives of the trainers. A good day to visit is 13 July when a mini-naadam is held for the benefit of trainers who missed the archery and wrestling events. You could even ride your own horse to the racing grounds. **Steppe Riders** (www.stepperiders.com) does four-day trips from its base near Bogd Khan Uul.

A recent addition to the Naadam programme is anklebone shooting. This entails flicking a sheep anklebone at a small target (also made from anklebones) about 3m away. The competition is held in the **Anklebone Shooting Area** (Map p64) near the archery stadium.

Admission to the stadium (except for the two ceremonies), and to the archery and horse racing are free, but you'll definitely need a ticket for the opening ceremony and possibly the last round or two of the wrestling and closing ceremony. Ticket costs vary per section; the north side of the stadium (which is protected from the sun and rain by an overhang) is more expensive with tickets going for US\$25 or more. This section is also less crowded and everyone will get a seat. These tickets are distributed via the tour operators and hotels.

There is no ticket window for general seating but you can buy a ticket from scalpers who hang around the stadium. The original price will be printed on the ticket (the cheapest sections go for T2000); you can expect to pay three or four times this for the service charge. Guesthouse owners normally help their guests buy tickets.

The general seating sections are always oversold so unless you get in early you'll end up sitting in the aisle or standing by the gate. The bandstand on the west end of the stadium offers some shade.

To find out what is going on during the festival, look for the events programme in the two English-language newspapers.

Dalanzadgad (T13,300, 12 hours), all leaving between 7.30am and 8am.

The western bus station, called the **Dragon (Luu) Avto Vaksal** (Dragon bus stand; off Map p64; ☎ 634 902), is on Peace Ave, 7km west of Sükhbaatar Sq. The station has a daily bus to Tsetserleg (T10,500, 11 hours), Arvaikheer (T9000, 10 hours) and Dundgov (T7100, six hours), all departing at 8am. A bus to Kharkhorin (T10,000, eight hours) leaves at 9am. Two buses travel to Erdenet (T8000, seven hours) at noon and 2pm, while four buses go to Darkhan (T4500, four hours) at 9am, 10am, 3pm and 4pm. On Monday Wednesday and Friday a bus travels to Bulgan (T7900, eight hours) at 8am.

A third station is located at **Teeverin Tovchoo** (Map pp70-1; Undsen Khuulin Gudamj), the old bus station, about a 10- to 15-minute walk from the centre. It has a bus to Mörön (T20,000) departing at noon on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Buy tickets in the New Mind building behind the station or call ☎ 9925 8048 for info.

Bus tickets can be purchased two days prior to travel. Tickets purchased on the same day of travel may carry a higher price.

## Hitching

Hitching is a necessary form of transport in the countryside, but is less certain and more difficult to organise out of Ulaanbaatar. Most Mongolians get out of the capital city by bus, minibus, train or shared jeep/taxi, and then hitch a ride on a truck for further trips around the countryside, where there is far less public transport. Unless you can arrange a ride at a guesthouse, you should do the same.

## Minivan & Jeep

Minivans and buses heading for destinations in the north and west (but not east) leave from the **Dragon (Luu) Avto Vaksal** (Dragon bus stand; off Map p64; ☎ 634 902) on Peace Ave, 7km west of Sükhbaatar Sq. Minivans for all destinations use the Naran Tuul market. For the Gobi, the Mandalgov-bound minivans use the Dragon bus stand while vans for Ömnögov usually use Naran Tuul.

Overall, the Dragon bus stand is better for the casual traveller (riders at Naran Tuul are often traders with lots of bulky luggage to deal with). Naran Tuul, however chaotic, has many more vehicles leaving throughout the day.

Local bus 26, trolleybus 2 and some mini-vans (ask the tout) link Dragon bus stand with Sükhbaatar Sq. Van 13 goes to the Naran Tuul market.

Most departures from the bus stands are between 8am and 9am. If taking a long trip, get to the station by 7am to sort out what's going where. Almost all services are in Russian vans or jeeps. For local destinations you might find a Korean compact car or even a regular bus.

Both bus stands are essentially a bunch of vans sitting in a lot with their destinations posted in the dashboard (in Cyrillic). Tell the drivers where you want to go and you'll be directed to the correct van. Some vehicles may be ready to go but others might not be leaving for another day.

Don't expect to leave straight away, even if the van is already bursting with people and cargo. There are no fixed schedules and the drivers depart when they see fit. Try to find out exactly what time the driver is leaving and if it's not going immediately you could ask the driver to save your seat and you can return later.

For more information try calling the minivan companies at ☎ 321 730, 634 902 or 9525 3146.

Dragon bus stand and Naran Tuul both serve towns in Töv aimag. For Nalaikh (T700) and Baganuur (T3000) use Naran Tuul. For Zuunmod (T1000) and Eej Khad (T8000 return) use Dragon bus stand. These minivans go every hour or so.

### MOUNTAIN BIKING NEAR ULAANBAATAR

The best short bike ride from Ulaanbaatar goes from Zaisan to the Observatory. From the city centre, travel south to the Zaisan Memorial. (Try to avoid going over congested Peace Bridge by taking Olympiin Örgön Chölöö over the railway tracks.) From Zaisan, continue in an easterly direction. The road follows the southern bank of the Tuul River for 11km until you reach the road to the Observatory. Follow the switchbacks uphill to the Observatory. From the Observatory you can descend briefly through the forest to the left (as you are looking downhill), pick up the trail in the next valley, and return to Ulaanbaatar on the same road. It's a two- to three-hour return trip.

Both stands also have jeeps and vans for hire at around T400 per kilometre. Budget travellers could try to deal directly with a driver for a multiday trip, as you would do in the countryside, although it's usually safer to go through a trusted travel agent or guesthouse.

The following list gives average prices for a seat in a minivan or jeep to selected locations. You'll also find vehicles to smaller villages, for example, vehicles from Naran Tuul direct to Dadal (T20,000) in northern Khentii.

Destination	Cost
Altai (Алтай)	T35,000
Arvaikheer (Арвайхээр)	T13,000
Baruun-Urt (Баруун-Урт)	T18,000
Bayankhongor (Баянхонгор)	T20,000
Bulgan (Булган)	T10,000
Choibalsan (Чойбалсан)	T20,000
Dalanzadgad (Даланзадгад)	T24,000
Darkhan (Дархан)	T8000
Kharkhorin (Хархорин)	T10,000
Khovd (Ховд)	T50,000
Mandalgov (Мандалговь)	T12,000
Mörön (Мөрөн)	T25,000
Öndörkhaan (Өндөрхаан)	T12,000
Tsetserleg (Цэцэрлэг)	T15,000
Ulaangom (Улаангом)	T50,000
Uliastai (Улиастай)	T30,000

### Taxi

Taxis (shared or private) can only travel along paved roads, so they are only useful for trips around Töv aimag, to the towns along the main road to Russia (Darkhan, Erdenet and Sükhbaatar) and to the tourist site of Kharkhorin.

The cost of hiring a taxi to these places should be around T400 per kilometre. The taxi drivers may want more for waiting if you are, for example, visiting Mandshir Khiid, or because they may be returning with an empty vehicle if dropping you off somewhere remote. This is not unreasonable, but it is negotiable.

To avoid any argument about the final charge make sure that you and the driver have firstly agreed on the cost per kilometre, and have discussed any extra charges. Then write down the number shown on the odometer/speedometer before you start.

### Train

The train station (Map p64) has an information office, a left-luggage office, a phone office, a hotel and a restaurant.

### DOMESTIC TRAIN TIMETABLE

Destination	Train No	Frequency	Departure	Duration (hr)	Fare (hard/soft seat)
Choir	284	Fri, Sun	5.40pm	6	T2000/5300
Darkhan	271	daily	10.30am	8	T2600/6400
Darkhan	211 (fast)	daily	3.50pm	5	T2600/6400
Erdenet	273	daily	7pm	11	T3600/9000
Sainshand	285	daily	10.15am	10	T6200/9500
Sükhbaatar	263	daily	7.35pm	7¼	T3500/8400
Sükhbaatar	271	daily	10.30am	7¼	T3500/8400
Zamyn-Üüd	276	daily	4.30pm	15½	T5100/12,800
Zamyn-Üüd	34 (fast)	Mon, Wed, Fri	8.05pm	12	-/T20,000

From Ulaanbaatar, daily trains travel to northern Mongolia and on to Russia, via Darkhan and Sükhbaatar, and southeast to China, via Choir, Sainshand and Zamyn-Üüd. There are also lines between Ulaanbaatar and the coal-mining towns of Erdenet and Baganuur.

Note that when buying a ticket you must show identification, either a passport or a driving licence will do (a student ID won't work).

### DOMESTIC

The **domestic railway ticket office** (Map p64; ☎ 24137; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-9pm) is located in the modern-looking building on the east side of the train station. Unfortunately, no-one inside speaks anything except Mongolian or Russian. Boards inside the office show departure times (in Cyrillic) and ticket prices for hard seats and soft seats. There's also a full timetable at the information desk on the station platform. See also the boxed text (above).

Tickets can be booked up to a month in advance for an extra T450, which is not a bad idea if you have definite plans and want a soft seat during peak times (mainly July to August). If you speak Mongolian, there is an **inquiries number** (☎ 24194).

### INTERNATIONAL

The yellow International Railway Ticketing Office (Map p64) is about 200m northwest of the train station. Inside the office, specific rooms sell tickets to Irkutsk and Moscow in Russia, and to Beijing, Ereen and Hohhot in China. The easiest place to book a ticket is in the **foreigners booking office** (☎ 24133, inquiries 944 868; Room 212; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri). It's upstairs and staff here speak some English. On weekends you can use the downstairs booking desk.

### GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

From the city to the airport, bus 11 (T200) stops at the Ard Kino on Baga Toiruu and opposite the Bayangol Hotel. On its way to the airport bus 22 stops near Liberty Sq and Ikh Toiruu, near the Cartography Co Map Shop. Coming to the city from the airport, it turns right on Peace Ave and then left up the east end of Baga Toiruu. To find the bus stop near the airport, head out of the terminal, walk north for a few hundred metres and look for a group of locals mingling around a tin shelter.

If you have a lot of gear, or don't know your way around, it's worth paying extra for a taxi. Make sure that you pay the standard rate, at the time of writing T300 per kilometre, which works out around US\$5 one way to Sükhbaatar Sq.

### Bicycle

Mongolian drivers are downright dangerous so riding a bike around town can be hazardous to your health. There are no bike lanes and you should never expect to have right of way. Seven Summits (p93) rents mountain bikes for US\$16 per day. Korean-made bikes are sold opposite the State Department Store, they cost around US\$100 and are a good investment if you plan to cycle for a week or more. They can probably be re-sold when you're done with it.

### Bus & Minivans

Local public transport is reliable and departures are frequent, but buses can get crowded. Conductors collect fares (at the time of writing T200 for a bus or T150 for a trolleybus for any trip around Ulaanbaatar, including to the airport) and usually have change. Pickpockets and bag slashers occasionally

ply their trade on crowded routes. Seal up all pockets, hold your bag on your chest and be careful when boarding.

Minivans (T200) run along a similar route to the buses. Most will run the length of Peace Ave, often turning back at the Naran Tuul market or the train station. They stop at the bus stops or you can flag one down. Van 13 goes to the Naran Tuul market. The fixed routes posted in the windows are incomprehensible to most passengers. The best way to handle these vehicles is to tell the conductor where you're headed and wait for a positive response.

For short trips it's just as cheap to take a taxi, especially if there is more than one of you. Some useful buses and trolleybuses:

Destination	Bus No	Trolleybus No
Airport	11, 22	-
Dragon bus stand	2	26
Nalaikh	33	-
Naran Tuul market	32	-
Peace Ave (east)	1, 13, 20, 21, 23	2, 4, 5, 6
Peace Ave (west)	4, 21, 22, 23	2, 5, 26
Train station	6, 20	4
Winter Palace	3, 19	-
Yarmag	8	-
Zaisan Memorial	7	-

All destinations will be in Cyrillic; the route number is next to the destination sign on the front of the trolleybus or bus. The route is often marked on the side of the bus.

### Car

**Sixt Mongolia** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 310 075; www.sixt.mn; Bodi Tower 101, Sükhbaatar Sq 3; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), which has a second office on Undsen Khuulin Gudamj, hires out Toyota Landcruisers for US\$125 per day and Scodas for US\$54 per day with the driver. Prices decrease if you rent for multiple days. If that still sounds like too much, you could hire a taxi by the day (most hotels can organise this), and pay the usual rate of T300 per kilometre. Driving your own car is wrought with pitfalls. A simple fender bender, whether or not it was your fault, can land you in jail with a steep fine to pay. If you rent, check the insurance policy carefully.

**Drive Mongolia** (☎ 312 277, 9911 8257; www.drive-mongolia.com) offers driving tours of Mongolia, allowing you to drive the car with a backup support vehicle.

### Taxi

In Ulaanbaatar, there are official and unofficial taxis; in fact, just about every vehicle is a potential taxi. All charge a standard T300 per kilometre, though you'll need to check the current rate as this will increase regularly. Don't agree to a set daily price because you will always pay more than if you pay the standard rate per kilometre. Nowadays, all taxis and even some private cars have meters.

Taxi drivers will definitely try to take advantage of you if you are new to the city and don't know your way around. The more confident you appear the better chance you have of getting a fair deal. Know generally where you are going before you get in the cab so you don't get 'taken for a ride'. Always remember to have the driver reset the odometer to zero and agree on per kilometre rate before setting off.

Getting a taxi is just a matter of standing by the side of a main street and holding your arm out in the street with your fingers down. Alternatively, you can find them at designated taxi stands near the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts, outside the train station, in Liberty Sq and near the State Department Store. After dark, women should generally avoid using a private car, and stick to an official taxi.

The most visible official taxi company is **City Taxi** (☎ 300 000), which runs a fleet of modern, yellow Hyundai Accents.

The **Safe Taxi Company** (☎ 9979 8185; www.safetaxi.mn) is a British-Australian run venture, established to provide safe and reliable transport around the city and to nearby sites such as Terelj and Mandshir Khiid. Airport transfers are also planned. There will be no cash transactions with the driver: flat-fee fares are paid for at hotels and restaurants around the city. You get a chit with the destination printed on it that you show to the driver. Expats and Mongolians can buy a pre-paid account and summon a taxi by text message.