

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

For several, if not all, nights of your Trans-Siberian journey your bed will be on the train (for the options, see p331). But at either end of your journey and most likely at points along it you'll be looking for more traditional accommodation.

Russia

Russia's range of accommodation is constantly improving, with everything from camp sites and cosy homestays to five-star luxury hotels on offer. You'll occasionally come across hotels (Novosibirsk is infamous) that refuse to let you stay because you're a foreigner, or will only allow you to stay in the most expensive rooms. Other-

wise you can generally stay where you like, though beware that cheaper hotels will rarely be able to register your visa.

It's a good idea to book a few nights in advance for Moscow and St Petersburg, but elsewhere it's usually not necessary. Make bookings by email or fax rather than telephone, and note that many hotels charge a *bron* (booking surcharge) up to 50% of the first night's accommodation rate.

If you're looking for cheaper places to stay, head for the smaller towns or consider a homestay; many travel agencies can arrange these. Moscow, Irkutsk and St Petersburg each have one or more youth or backpacker hostels, most able to offer visa support. Camping in the wild is generally allowed – check with locals if you're in doubt. *Kempingi* (organised camp sites) are rare and, usually, only open from June to September. Unlike Western camp sites, small wooden cabins often take up much of the space, leaving little room for tents. Some *kempingi* are in quite attractive woodland settings but communal toilets and washrooms are often in poor condition and other facilities few.

Komnaty otdykha (resting rooms) are found at all major train stations along the Trans-Siberian route and are very cheap (from R10 per hour, R120 per half-day), which is why they are often booked up. Rooms are usually shared and there are often no bathrooms. At the bigger stations, such as Novosibirsk, the *komnaty otdykha* are excellent and the private luxe rooms are well worth the extra expense. At many other stations the rooms are very basic.

In hotels *potseleye* (twin rooms) are occasionally cheaper than singles. It's often possible to pay half again when only one person is staying, especially in small towns – though in twin rooms you may end up sharing with a stranger. A *lyux* room equates to a suite with a sitting room in addition to the bedroom and bathroom. A *polu-lyux* room is somewhat less spacious. Note that size doesn't always equate to better quality.

Often each hotel floor has a *dezhurnaya* (floor lady) to keep an eye on it and to supply guests with snacks, bottled drinks or boiled water. They might even do your laundry.

Check-out time is usually noon, but it's unlikely that anyone will mind if you stay an extra hour or two. It's usually no problem storing your luggage.

Hotels with significant numbers of foreign guests also attract prostitutes; you'll usually be left alone if you make it clear you're not interested.

For a hostel dorm bed in Moscow and St Petersburg you can expect to pay around R600, while a double room with bathroom in a budget hotel in these cities will cost anything up to R2500. Elsewhere budget hotels can be as cheap as R300 a night with shared facilities, although R600 is a more realistic minimum for many cities.

You'll pay R600 to R1500 for a midrange twin (except in Moscow and St Petersburg, where it's R2500 to R5000). Luxury hotels in the major cities charge US\$200 for singles, US\$400 for doubles. In provincial cities, expect to pay upwards from R2000, although you may get better prices through a travel agent. Prices in top-end places will usually be quoted in dollars, sometimes euros, on top of which you'll typically pay 20% Value Added Tax (VAT) and 5% local tax (not included in prices quoted in this book).

China

Overall, accommodation in China is quite humdrum. Be warned that the star rating

PRACTICALITIES

- Electrical power in Russia, China and Mongolia is 220V, 50Hz. Sockets in Russia and Mongolia are designed to accommodate two round prongs in the European style. Chinese plugs come in at least four designs: three-pronged angled pins as used in Australia; three-pronged round pins as in Hong Kong; two-pronged flat pins as in the USA; or two narrow round pins as in Europe. For more information, check www.kropla.com.
- Russia and Mongolia both follow the international metric system. Although China also officially subscribes to the metric system, ancient Chinese weights and measures persist. Fruit and vegetables are sold by the *jin*, which is 0.5kg (1.32lb). Tea and herbal medicines are usually sold by the *liang*, which is 37.5g (1.32oz).
- In Moscow the best source of English-language news is the daily *Moscow Times*, available free across the city; in St Petersburg, the *St Petersburg Times* is an excellent free biweekly read. Top-end hotels in these cities usually have copies of the *International Herald-Tribune*, the *Financial Times* and occasionally some of the British broadsheets, as well as weekly magazines such as *The Economist* and *Time*. Elsewhere in Russia the pickings of English media are very slim, and most likely nonexistent. China's main English-language newspaper is the *China Daily*. Imported English-language newspapers and magazines can be bought from five-star hotel bookshops. Look out for free expat-focused English-language listings magazines, including *That's Beijing* and *Time Out Beijing*. In Ulaanbaatar there are two English-language weekly newspapers, *The Mongol Messenger* and *The UB Post*, both good for local news and entertainment information. On the train you'll sometimes come across the free glossy monthly magazine *Ekspress* (in Russian). It's also common for deaf-and-dumb hawkers to sell newspapers, magazines and books along the carriages – a pile will be left in your compartment to leaf through.
- Radio in Russia is broken into three bands: AM, UKV (66MHz to 77MHz) and FM (100MHz to 107MHz). A Western-made FM radio usually won't go lower than 85MHz. The BBC's World Service's short-wave (SW) frequencies in the morning, late evening and night are near 9410kHz, 12,095kHz (the best) and 15,070kHz, though the exact setting varies with locations. In China listen to the **BBC World Service** (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/tuning/) or **Voice of America** (www.voaa.gov) – check the websites for frequencies. China Radio International (CRI) is China's overseas radio service and broadcasts in about 40 foreign languages. In Mongolia BBC World Service has a nonstop service at 103.1FM. Local stations worth trying include Jag (107FM), Blue Sky (100.9FM) and Radio Ulaanbaatar (102.5FM). Voice of America news is occasionally broadcast on 106.6FM.

at China's hotels can be very misleading. Hotels are often awarded four or five stars, when they are patently a star lower in ranking. Take time to wander round and make a quick inspection of the overall quality or stick to chain hotels with recognisable names.

Camping is not really feasible in China, especially within sight of a town or village. Wilderness camping is more appealing, but most areas require special permits, which are difficult to obtain. The good news, however, is that other cheap accommodation options are available. University dormitories sometimes rent rooms to tourists, and there is a good range of hostels in Beijing.

The price and quality of hotels in China vary considerably, especially in Beijing. A typical hotel room is a 'twin' – two single beds in one room. A 'single room' (one bed per room) is a rarity, although they do exist. The Western concept of a 'double room' (a room with one double bed shared by two people) is also rare in China. In most cases, your choice will be between a twin room or a suite. However, two people are usually allowed to occupy a twin room for the same price as one person, so sharing is a good way to cut expenses.

A dorm bed in the centre of Beijing goes for about US\$7. Twin hotel rooms there start at around US\$25.

Mongolia

Mongolia is perhaps the most perfect camping destination in the world. Excellent camping sites are everywhere, even near Ulaanbaatar in places such as Terelj. If you are travelling in the countryside, camping is an even better option, considering the lack of hotels and the expense of *ger* (yurt) camps. Be sure to carry enough supplies and water for the duration of your stay, since they may be hard to come by, depending on where you are.

A tourist *ger* camp is a 'camping ground' with traditional *gers*, a separate building for toilets and showers, and a restaurant-bar. The *gers* are furnished with two or three beds. Toilets and bathrooms, which are separate and shared, are usually clean. Most *ger* camps in Terelj are open from June to September. In the Gobi Desert, they are open from May to October.

Ulaanbaatar has an abundant range of guesthouses targeting foreign backpackers.

Most guesthouses are in apartment blocks and have dorm beds as well as private rooms. Many guesthouses also offer laundry services, Internet connection and travel services. Some of the guesthouses can also arrange for long-term guests (staying one week or more) to rent a private apartment. At around US\$20 per day, an apartment is much better value than Ulaanbaatar's hotels, which are decent but overpriced. Comfortable and clean, guesthouse and apartment rooms usually have hot water and satellite TV, and maybe even English-speaking staff members.

Dorm beds at Ulaanbaatar guesthouses start as low as US\$3, private rooms around US\$10. You will be hard-pressed to find a double at a midrange hotel for less than US\$40.

Ger camps typically charge US\$30 to US\$40 per person per night, including three hearty meals, but prices are negotiable, and they may drop considerably if you bring your own food.

ACTIVITIES

The countryside traversed by the Trans-Siberian rail routes is a veritable playground for outdoor (and some indoor) activities. Some of the options, from steaming in *banai* (hot baths) to diving and ice fishing in Lake Baikal, are covered below.

Banai

A combination of dry sauna, steam bath, massage and plunges into ice-cold water, the *banya* is a weekly event that is a regular part of Russian life (see p44). All Russian cities will have *banai*, and they're generally worth visiting.

Beaches

There are some good beaches at the Vladivostok end of the Trans-Siberian, especially if you head out to the more remote areas of Primorsky Krai. In St Petersburg, the locals are partial to a spot of sunbaking beside the Peter & Paul Fortress. Perhaps more surprising are the opportunities to strip off and lounge on the sand within Russia. Moscow, Kazan and Khabarovsk all have riverside beach areas where the locals flock on steamy days. On the artificial Ob Sea at Novosibirsk (p165) there's even a nudist beach.

Cycling

Poor roads and manic drivers are two of the main hazards to cyclists in Russia. Otherwise you will find rural Russians quite fascinated and friendly towards long-distance riders. Just make certain you have a bike designed for the harshest of conditions and that you carry plenty of spare parts.

Cycling is a practical means of transportation, as well as an entertaining way to explore Beijing. The neighbourhoods and *hutong* (narrow alleyways) seem to have been built with bicycles in mind, as they are the only vehicles that can fit down some of them.

In Ulaanbaatar, cycling is more enjoyable (and safer) outside the city.

There are a number of agencies offering organised bike tours:

Ekaterinburg Guide Center (☎ 343-268 1604; www.ekaterinburg-guide.com; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 1, side entrance, Yekaterinburg)

Team Gorky (☎ 8312-651 999; www.teamgorky.ru; ul 40 let Oktyabrya 1a, Nizhny Novgorod)

Ural Expeditions & Tours (☎ 343-376 2800; http://welcome-ural.ru; 23 Posadsakaya ul, Yekaterinburg)

Diving

Fancy diving in Lake Baikal? Such specialist trips can be arranged through **Diveworldwide** (☎ 0845 130 6980; www.diveworldwide.com) in the UK, or **MGU** (☎ 095-105 7799; www.dive.ru/English) in Moscow.

Fishing

Siberia and the Russian Far East are an angler's paradise with rivers swollen with grayling and various species of salmon. Organised fishing trips, however, can be heart-stoppingly expensive. While it is possible to go it alone and just head off with rod and tackle, most regions have severe restrictions on fishing. Travel agencies in Irkutsk (p191), Ulan-Ude (p213), Khabarovsk (p225) and Vladivostok (p232) can arrange fishing trips in their regions.

Hiking & Mountaineering

The best place for trekking along the Trans-Siberian route is around Lake Baikal, with the most adventurous options being at the northern end of the lake. There's even a project to create a hiking trail around the entire circumference of the lake: see www.earthisland.org (select 'Baikal Watch' from the Earth Island Projects drop-down menu) for details.

Many of the towns that lie along the Baikal-Amur Mainline (Baikalo-Amurskaya Magistral, or BAM) are good bases for heading out into the wilds and further afield. Krasnoyarsk's Stolby Nature Reserve (p187) is a striking landscape in which you can easily organise a day's hike. The hills and islands around Vladivostok also provide a full range of trekking options.

Possibilities for more serious mountain-climbing exist in the Sayan Mountains (on the Russian-Mongolian border; p184) and in the Baikalsky Range on the western shore of Lake Baikal.

Both China and Mongolia offer excellent opportunities for hiking within day trips of the capitals. The most popular (and deservedly so) locales for hikes near Beijing are along the Great Wall (p292), with a wide variety in terms of levels of challenge and degree of remoteness. Hiking destinations near Ulaanbaatar include Manzushir Khiid (p267), the Gorkhi-Terelj National Park (p268) and Tsetseegun Uul (p268).

Horse Riding

A visit to Mongolia is not complete without a ride on a horse. *Ger* camps at Terelj (p268) rent horses and can direct riders to trails with some spectacular scenery. Most travel agencies in Ulaanbaatar also organise more extensive treks.

River Trips & Rafting

River trips are offered across Russia from May to October, with cruises along the Volga being particularly popular. It's possible to sail between St Petersburg and Kazan, with stops at Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod en route; see p120 for details of agents offering tickets on such cruises. Other river trips include excursions along the Irtysh between Omsk and Tobolsk (p165), along the Yenisey from Krasnoyarsk (p189) and on the Amur from Khabarovsk (p229). And, of course, there are also the sailings down the Angara River from Irkutsk to Lake Baikal (p197).

For those looking for a bit more adventure on the water, rafting trips can be organised out of Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk (in the Altai region of southern Siberia), and Vladivostok.

Winter Sports

With all that snow could you really pass up the chance to indulge in some winter sports while crossing Siberia? Possibilities include cross-country skiing, skating, troika rides – even dog sledding! Lake Baikal is a particularly spectacular place to visit in winter: at Baikalsk there's a ski resort and you can even drive across the frozen lake and go ice fishing.

BUSINESS HOURS Russia

In Russia government offices open from 9am or 10am to 5pm or 6pm weekdays. Banks usually open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and some open 9am to 5pm Saturday. Currency-exchange booths open long hours, and on Saturday and sometimes Sunday too. Museum hours change often, as do their weekly days off. Most stop selling tickets 30 minutes to an hour before closing.

Most Russian shops are open Monday to Saturday, although increasingly you will find seven-day and even some 24-hour operations. Food shops tend to open from 8am to 8pm except for a *pereryv* (break) between 1pm and 2pm or 2pm and 3pm; some close later, and some open Sunday until 5pm. It's rare not to be able to find kiosks selling food and drink around the clock. Restaurants typically open from noon to midnight except for a break between afternoon and evening meals.

China & Mongolia

Government offices and businesses in China and Mongolia operate on a five-day work week, generally from 9am to 5pm, often closing for lunch between noon and 2pm. Shops and museums are usually open on weekends, and may be closed instead for one or two days midweek. Some branches of the Bank of China may be open on the weekend.

In Ulaanbaatar, however, the banks usually open from 9am to 7pm weekdays, and there are several offering 24-hour banking. Many museums and tourist attractions have shorter hours and more days off in winter.

CHILDREN

Travelling in Russia, China or Mongolia with children can be a ball as long as you come well prepared with the right attitudes, equipment and patience.

Practicalities

Baby-changing rooms are not common in any of the three countries and you wouldn't want to use many public toilets yourself, let alone change your baby's nappy in them. Nappies, powdered milk and baby food are widely available except in very rural areas.

HIKING SAFETY

Before embarking on a hike, consider the following:

- Be sure you're healthy and feel comfortable about hiking for a sustained period. The nearest village in Russia can be vastly further away than in other countries.
- Get the best information you can about the physical and environmental conditions along your intended route. Russian 'trails' are generally nominal ideas rather than marked footpaths so employing a guide is very wise.
- Walk only in regions, and on trails, within your realm of experience.
- Be prepared for severe and sudden changes in the weather and terrain; always take wet-weather gear.
- Pack essential survival gear including emergency food rations and a leak-proof water bottle.
- If you can, find a hiking companion. At the very least tell someone where you're going and refer to your compass frequently so you can find your way back.
- Unless you're planning a camping trip, start early so you can make it home before dark.
- Allow more time than you anticipate.
- Consider renting, or even buying (then later reselling), a pack horse, especially in southern Siberia where this is fairly inexpensive.

Finding English-language kids' publications will be a challenge, although there's no shortage of toy shops.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* contains useful advice on how to cope with kids on the road and what to bring to make things go more smoothly.

Sights & Activities

In Moscow and St Petersburg there are the old stand-bys of the zoo, various parks and the circus, but elsewhere, diversions are more problematic. On trains, children are likely to find playmates of their own age, but as many distractions such as toys and books as you can manage would be wise. Consider using the trip as an opportunity to teach children about the region's history and geography.

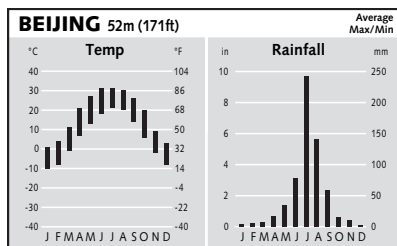
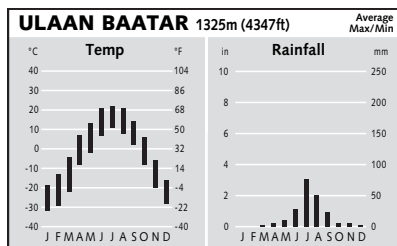
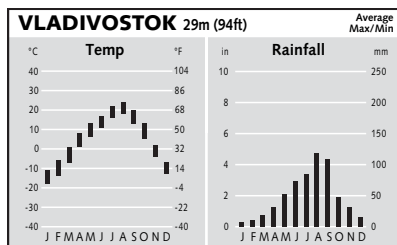
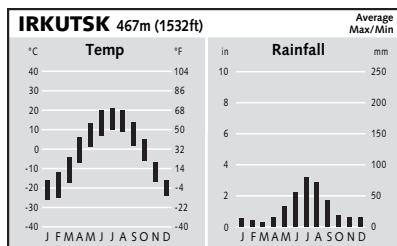
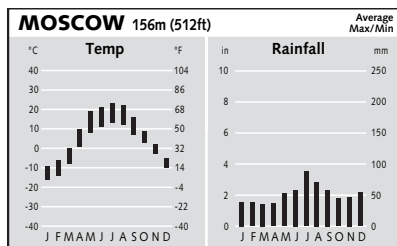
One thing to inquire about in the summer months are the children's railway parks dotted all across Russia. They have actual working trains which are accurate small-scale replicas of the bigger ones. Children take part in all of the activities from ticket sales to engineers; it's all in Russian, but it could also be interesting to watch and you could arrange for a guide to assist you with translations. The website **Children's Railways** (<http://railways.id.ru/english/index.html>) gives details of the parks. There's also one in Harbin (p276).

Beijing's historical and architectural masterpieces will probably bore the children to pieces. That is, only until they spot the toboggans at the Great Wall at Mutianyu (p293) and the flying saucer boats at Beihai Park (p285). Other favourite spots for children in Beijing include **Ritan Park** (☎ 010-8563 5038; Ritan Lu; adult Y1; ☎ 6am-9pm; 🚶 Chaoyangmen) and the **Beijing Zoo & Beijing Aquarium** (☎ 010-6831 4411; 137 Xizhimenwai Dajie; adult Y10, pandas Y5 extra; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm; 🚶 Xizhimen). Harbin also has the Siberian Tiger Park (p275).

Unfortunately Ulaanbaatar does not cater so much to visiting children, although the dinosaur exhibit at the Museum of Natural History (p261) should certainly capture their imaginations.

CLIMATE CHARTS

See p13 and p280 for advice on the best times to visit the regions covered by the Trans-Siberian Railway.



CUSTOMS Russia

Customs controls are relatively relaxed these days, although if you leave Russia by a land border, they can be lengthy. Apart from the usual restrictions, bringing in and out large amounts of cash is limited, although the amount at which you have to go through the red channel changes frequently. At the time of writing visitors were allowed to bring in US\$10,000 (or equivalent) in currency and take out US\$3000 without making a customs declaration.

On entering Russia you might be given a *deklaratsiya* (customs declaration), on which you should list any currency you are carrying and any items of worth. List mobile phones, cameras and laptops to avoid any potential problems on leaving Russia. It's best if you can get your declaration stamped on entry (to do so go through the red lane at bigger airports) and then simply show the same declaration on exiting Russia. However, sometimes customs points are totally unstaffed, so it's not always possible. The system seems to be in total flux, with officials usually very happy for you to fill out declarations on leaving the country if necessary.

If you plan to export anything vaguely 'arty' – manuscripts, instruments, coins, jewellery, antiques, antiquarian books – it must be assessed by the **Committee for Culture** (Moscow ☎ 095-921 3258; ul Neglinnaya 8/10, room 298; St Petersburg ☎ 812-311 5196; Malaya Morskaya ul 17). The bureaucrats will issue a receipt for tax paid (usually 100% of the purchase price; bring your sales docket), presented to customs on your way out. If you buy something large, a photograph is usually fine for assessment purposes.

China

Chinese customs generally pay tourists little attention. There are no restrictions on foreign currency, but you should declare any cash exceeding US\$5000 (or its equivalent in another currency).

Objects considered to be antiques require a certificate and red seal to clear customs. To get the proper certificate and red seal, your antiques must be inspected by the **Relics Bureau** (Wénwù Jiànding; ☎ 010-6401 4608, no English spoken). Basically anything made before 1949 is considered an antique and needs a certificate, and if it was made

before 1795 it cannot legally be taken out of the country.

Mongolia

Again, customs procedures are fairly straightforward and the main issue for the foreign traveller is the export of antiques. For any antiques you must have a receipt and customs certificate from the place you bought them; most reliable shops in Ulaanbaatar can provide this. If you don't get one of these you'll need to get one from the **Centre of Cultural Heritage** (☎ 011-312 735, 323 747) in the Palace of Culture in Ulaanbaatar. You'll need to fill in a form giving your passport number, details of where the antique was purchased and two photos of the antique itself. If you have anything that even *looks* old, it is a good idea to get a document to indicate that it is not an antique. That goes for Buddha images and statues as well.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Russia, China and Mongolia are generally safe countries and crime against foreigners is rare. Pickpocketing is probably the biggest threat for the traveller, especially in crowded places such as public transport, markets and tourist attractions. The risk is greatly reduced if you keep valuables in money belts or under a layer of clothes. Hotels are generally quite safe, but leaving valuables lying around your room would be tempting providence. Always take precautions at youth hostels and guesthouses, where other travellers may be trying to subsidise their journeys.

You needn't be too concerned about the so-called 'Mafia'. Russia's organised crime problem is far more complex, and far less of a threat to visitors, than one might guess from reading an issue of *Newsweek*. In general, Moscow's and St Petersburg's streets are about as safe, or as dangerous, as those of New York or London and, with the possible exception of Irkutsk (where some muggings have been reported), you're highly unlikely to suffer any problems in Siberia or the Russian Far East.

The key is to be neither paranoid nor insouciant. Use common sense and be aware that it's pretty obvious you're a Westerner. Anything you can do to try to fit in is a good idea, so scrap the day-pack and carry your goods in a plastic bag.

On the whole the trains are reasonably safe, but it always pays to take simple precautions with your luggage. If you've got the compartment to yourself, ask the *provodnitsa* (carriage attendant) to lock it when you leave for the restaurant car or get out at the station platforms.

Queuing is basically nonexistent in China and Mongolia and there are very specific rules for it in Russia. In most cases, neither being polite nor getting angry will help. If you have the head for it, sharpen your elbows, learn a few scowling phrases in the appropriate languages, and plough head-first through the throng. Good luck.

Spitting in China is only slightly less popular than badminton. Although it is technically illegal in Beijing, everyone does it everywhere, loudly and flamboyantly.

Mosquitoes are the bane of summer throughout the region. Mostly, they're an annoyance, but in rural areas of Siberia they can be a grave health threat. For some precautions to take against them, see p340.

Although the situation is constantly improving, plumbing is at best erratic and at worst atrocious in all three countries.

Scams

In Russia, be very wary of officials, such as police (or people posing as police), asking to see your papers or tickets at train stations – there's a fair chance they are on the lookout for a bribe and will try to find anything wrong with your documents, or basically hold them for a ransom. The only course of action is to remain calm, polite and stand your ground. Try to enlist the help of a passer-by to translate for you (or at least witness what is going on).

Another scam involves the use of devices in ATMs that read credit card and PIN details when you withdraw money from the machines, enabling accounts to be accessed and additional funds withdrawn. In general, it is safest to use ATMs in carefully guarded public places such as major hotels and restaurants.

It's possible on the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Mongolian railway routes to encounter official-looking men or women requesting that you buy insurance for around US\$10 – there is no need to do this. We've had reports, too, that the carriage attendants on the Mongolian trains are asking for a small

fee for use of hot water from the samovar: there's no obligation to pay this.

In Russia, there have been reports of employees of currency-exchange offices putting glue or chewing gum on the tray where they put the money, so one note sticks to it – it's usually a R1000 or R500 note. The simple way to avoid this situation is to count your money immediately.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Russia, China and Mongolia can be difficult places for disabled travellers. Most buildings, buses and trains are not wheelchair accessible. In China and Russia, crossing busy streets often requires using underground walkways with many steps. Uneven pavements in the cities and rough roads in the countryside make for uncomfortable and potentially dangerous travel.

Travelling on Trans-Siberian trains, while not impossible for the disabled, will certainly be a challenge. People in wheelchairs will have to be carried on and off the train and into their compartments, not to mention to the utterly disabled-unfriendly toilets.

Before setting off get in touch with your national support organisation (preferably with the travel officer, if there is one). The website www.everybody.co.uk has an airline directory that provides information on the disability-friendly facilities offered by various airlines. There are a number of organisations that offer general travel advice:

Accessible Journeys (☎ 800-846 4537; www.disabledtravel.com; USA)

Holiday Care Service (☎ 0845-124 9974; www.holidaycare.org.uk; 7th fl, Sunley House, 4 Bedford Park, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2AP, UK)

Mobility International USA (☎ 541-343 1284; www.miusa.org; PO Box 10767, Eugene, Oregon 974400, USA)

Nican (☎ 02-6285 3713; www.nican.com.au; PO Box 407, Curtin, ACT 2605, Australia)

DISCOUNT CARDS

Full-time students and people aged under 26 can sometimes (but not always) get a substantial discount on admissions – always flash your student card or International Student Identity Card (ISIC) before paying. If you're not a student but are under 26, ask a student agency at home for an ISIC Youth Card.

Senior citizens also *might* get a discount, but no promises: carry your pension card or passport anyway.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates Abroad

RUSSIA

Check out www.russianembassy.net for a full list of overseas Russian embassies and consulates.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6295 9033; rusemb@dynamite.com.au; 78 Canberra Ave, Griffith, ACT 2603); Sydney consulate (☎ 02-9326 1188; russcon@ozemail.com.au)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-235 4341; rusemb@intranet.ca; 285 Charlotte St, Ottawa, Canada K1N 8J5); Montreal consulate (☎ 514-843 5901; consulat@dsuper.net); Toronto consulate (☎ 416-962 9911; rusconsul@bellnet.ca)

France Paris (☎ 01 45 04 05 50; rusembr@club-internet.fr; 40-50 Blvd Lannes, 75116 Paris); Marseilles consulate (☎ 04 91 77 15 15; consrus@aix.pacwan.net); Strasbourg consulate (☎ 03 88 36 73 15; representationpermderussie@wanadoo.fr)

Germany Berlin (☎ 030-220 2821; rusembassy@trionet.de; Unter den Linden 63-65, 10117 Berlin); Bonn consulate (☎ 228-619 6076; bonn@russische-botschaft.de); Hamburg consulate (☎ 40-227 3424; general.konsulat-hamburg@metronet.de); Leipzig consulate (☎ 341-585 1876; rusegenkon_leipzig@t-online.de); Munich consulate (☎ 89-592 503; ruskonsmchn@t-online.de); Rostock consulate (☎ 381-492 2742)

Ireland (☎ 1-492 3525; russiane@indigo.ie; 184-186 Orwell Rd, Rathgar, Dublin 14)

Japan Tokyo (☎ 03-3583 4224; rosconsl@ma.kcom.ne.jp; 2-1-1 Azabudai, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0041); Niigata consulate (☎ 25-244 6015; niruscon@fsinet.or.jp); Osaka consulate (☎ 66-848 3452; russcons@mb.kcom.ne.jp); Sapporo consulate (☎ 11-0561 3171; Caa09680@smt.p01.odn.ne.jp)

Netherlands (☎ 70-345 1300; ambrusnl@euronet.nl; Andries Bickerweg 2, 2517 JP Den Haag)

New Zealand (☎ 04-476 6113; eor@netlink.co.nz; 57 Messines Rd, Karori, Wellington)

UK London (☎ 020-7229 3628; www.rusemblon.org; 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QX); Edinburgh consulate (☎ 131-225 7098; visa@edconsul.co.uk)

USA Washington (☎ 202-298 5700; 2650 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington, DC 20007); New York consulate (☎ 212-348 0926; mail@ruscon.org); San Francisco consulate (☎ 415-928 6878; consul@sbglobal.net); Seattle consulate (☎ 206-728 1910; consul@seanet.com)

CHINA

For a full list of diplomatic representation abroad, go to www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/and click on Missions Overseas.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 4780, 6273 4781; www.chinaembassy.org.au; 15 Coronation Dr, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Sydney consulate (☎ 02-9699 2216; [\[chineseconsulate.org/eng/\]\(http://chineseconsulate.org/eng/\)\); Melbourne consulate \(☎ 03-9822 0604\); Perth consulate \(☎ 08-9321 8193\)](http://sydney</p>
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Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-789 3434; www.chinaembassycanada.org; 515 St Patrick St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5H3); Toronto consulate (☎ 416-964 7260); Vancouver consulate (☎ 604-736 3910); Calgary consulate (☎ 403-264 3322)

France Paris (☎ 01 47 36 02 58; www.amb-chine.fr; 9 Ave V Cresson, 92130 Issy les Moulineux, Paris)

Ireland (☎ 1-269 1707; www.chinaembassy.ie; 40 Ailesbury Rd, Dublin 4)

Japan Tokyo (☎ 03-3403 3389, 3403 3065; 3-4-33 Moto-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo); Fukuoka consulate (☎ 92-713 1121; chinaconsul_fuk_jp@mfa.gov.cn); Osaka consulate (☎ 06-6445 9483; chinaconsul_osa_jp@mfa.gov.cn); Sapporo consulate (☎ 11-563 5563; chinaconsul_sap_jp@mfa.gov.cn)

New Zealand Wellington (☎ 04-472 1382; www.chinaembassy.org.nz; 2-6 Glenmore St, Wellington); Auckland consulate (☎ 9-525 1587)

UK London (☎ 020-7636 8845, 24hr visa information ☎ 0891 880 808; www.chinese-embassy.org.uk; 31 Portland Place, London); Manchester consulate (☎ 0161-224 7480); Edinburgh consulate (☎ 0131-316 4789)

USA Washington (☎ 202-338 6688; www.china-embassy.org; room 110, 2201 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington, DC); Chicago consulate (☎ 312-803 0098); Houston consulate (☎ 713-524 4311); Los Angeles consulate (☎ 213-380 2508); New York consulate (☎ 212-330 7410); San Francisco consulate (☎ 415-563 9232)

MONGOLIA

Canada (☎ 613-569-3830; www.mongolembassy.org; 151 Slater St, Suite 503, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H3)

China Beijing (☎ 010-6532 6216; www.mongolianembchina.org.cn; 2 Xiushui Beilu, Jianguomenwai Dajie, Beijing); Hohhot consulate (☎ 0471-430 3254; fax 0471-430 3250; Xinhong Gu Wulanxiagu, Bldg No 5, Hohhot)

France (☎ 01 46 05 23 18; info@ambassademongolie.fr; 5 Ave Robert Schumann, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-447 35122; mongolbot@aol.com; Dietzgen-Str 31, 13156, Berlin)

Japan (☎ 033-469 2088; embmong@gol.com; 21-4 Kumiyama-cho, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0047)

Kazakhstan (☎ 03272-200 865; monkazel@kazmail.asdc.kz; Ul Aubakerova 1/1, Almaty)

Russia Moscow (☎ 095-290 6792; buyar@msk.tsi.ru; Bori-soglebskaya per 11, Moscow); Irkutsk consulate (☎ 3952-342 145; irconsul@angara.ru; ul Lapina 11, Irkutsk); Ulan-Ude consulate (☎ 3012-220 499; mnc@burnet.ru; Hotel Baikal, ul Erbanova-12, Ulan-Ude) The embassy is close to Smolenskaya metro station. Visas are obtained from the consular section (☎ 095-244 7867; Spasoposkovsky per 7, Moscow) from 9am to 1pm Monday to Friday.

UK (☎ 020-7937 0150; www.embassyofmongolia.co.uk; 7-8 Kensington Ct, London W8 5DL)

USA Washington (☎ 202-333-7117; www.mongolianembassy.us; 2833 M St NW, Washington, DC 20007); New York consulate (☎ 212-472 6517; fax 212-861 9464; 6 East 77th St, New York, NY 10021)

Foreign Embassies & Consulates Along the Route

Generally speaking, embassies won't be much help if you are in some kind of trouble and are at fault. Remember: you are bound by local law and embassies will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. For example, if you have all your money and documents stolen, the embassy might assist with getting a new passport, but a loan for onward travel is out of the question.

If you will be travelling in these countries for a long period of time (say a month or over) and particularly if you're heading to remote locations, it's wise to register with your embassy. This can be done over the telephone or by email.

RUSSIA

Irkutsk

Mongolia (☎ 3952-342 145; irconsul@angara.ru; ul Lapina 11; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) One-month/three-day visas cost US\$30/20 processed in nine days, US\$43/28 in three to six days, US\$55/45 in two days or US\$105/85 in 24 hours. Visas for longer stays require invitation letters.

Khabarovsk

China (☎ 4212-302 519; fax 4212-328 390; Lenin Stadium 1) Visa applications taken 10.30am to 1pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday. A visa can be arranged in a day for about R4200 or in a week for R2400.

Japan (☎ 4212-326 907; fax 4212-327 212; ul Pushkina 38a)

Moscow

For a full list of embassies check www.themoscowtimes.ru/travel/facts/embassies.html.

Australia (☎ 095-956 6070; www.australianembassy.ru; Podkolokolny per 10A/2)

Canada (☎ 095-105 6000; fax 095-105 6025; Starokonyushenny per 23)

France (☎ 095-937 1500; www.ambafrance.ru; ul Bolshaya Yakimanka 45)

Germany (☎ 095-937 9500; www.germany.org.ru; Mosfilmovskaya ul 56)

Ireland (☎ 095-937 5911; fax 095-975 2066; Grokholsky per 5)

Netherlands (☎ 095-797 2900; fax 095-797 2904; Kalashny per 6)

UK (☎ 095-956 7200; www.britemb.msk.ru; Smolenskaya nab 10)

USA (☎ 095-728 5000; www.usembassy.state.gov/moscow; Bol Devyatinsky per 8)

Novosibirsk

Germany (☎ 383-223 1411; www.nowosibirsk.diplo.de; Krasny Pr 28)

St Petersburg

Belarus (☎ 812-273 0078; Office 66, nab Robespiera 8/64)

Canada (☎ 812-325 8448; fax 812-325 8364;

Malodetskoslensky pr 32B)

France (☎ 812-312 1130; fax 812-311 7283; nab reki Moyki 15)

Germany (☎ 812-327 2400; fax 812-327 3117; Furshtatskaya ul F39)

UK (☎ 812-320 3200; fax 812-325 3111; pl Proletarskoy Diktatury 5)

USA (☎ 812-275 1701; fax 812-110 7022; ul Furshtatskaya 15)

Ulan-Ude

Mongolia (☎ 3012-211 078; ul Profsoyuznaya 6;

☎ Mon, Wed & Fri) Apply for visas from 10am to 12.30pm; collect them at 5pm. One-month tourist visas cost US\$30 issued in nine days, US\$35 in a week, US\$45 in two days, US\$55 same day. Transit visas cost US\$20 to US\$35.

Vladivostok

China (☎ 4232-495 037; Hotel Gavan, ul Krygina 3) Visa applications accepted 9am to 12.30pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday. A visa costs about US\$125 and takes three to seven days.

Japan (☎ 4232-267 513; ul Verkhne-Portovaya 46)

Korea (☎ 4232-402 222; ul Pologa 19)

USA (☎ 4232-300 070; ul Pushkinskaya 32)

Yekaterinburg

Germany (☎ 343-359 6399; gk_jeka@yahoo.de; ul Kuybysheva 44)

UK (☎ 343-379 4931; britcon@sky.ru; ul Gogolya 15)

USA (☎ 343-379 4691; www.uscgyekat.ur.ru; ul Gogolya 15)

CHINA

Beijing

There are two main embassy compounds in Beijing – Jianguomenwai and Sanlitun.

Embassies are open from 9am to noon and 1.30pm to 4pm Monday to Friday, but visa departments are usually only open in the morning.

The following embassies are in the Jianguomenwai area:

Ireland (☎ 010-6532 2691; fax 010-6532 2168; 3 Ritan Donglu)

Japan (☎ 010-6532 2361; fax 010-6532 4625; 7 Ritan Lu)

Mongolia (☎ 010-6532 1203; fax 010-6532 5045; 2 Xiushui Beijie)

New Zealand (☎ 010-6532 2731; fax 010-6532 4317; 1 Ritan Dong Erjie)

UK (☎ 010-6532 1961; fax 010-6532 1937;

11 Guanghua Lu)

USA (☎ 010-6532 3831; fax 010-6532 6057; 3 Xiushui Beijie)

The Sanlitun compound is home to the following embassies:

Australia (☎ 010-6532 2331; fax 010-6532 6957;

21 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Canada (☎ 010-6532 3536; fax 010-6532 4072;

19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

France (☎ 010-6532 1331; fax 010-6532 4841; 3 Dongsan Jie)

Germany (☎ 010-6532 2161; fax 010-6532 5336; 17 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Russia (☎ 010-6532 1381; fax 010-6532 4853;

4 Dongzhimen Beizhongjie) West of the Sanlitun compound in a separate compound.

MONGOLIA

Ulaanbaatar

Canada (☎ 011-328 285; canada@mongolnet.mn; Bodicom Tower, 7th fl, Sükhbaataryn Gudamj)

China (☎ 011-320 955; fax 011-311 943; 5 Zaluuchuudyn Örgön Chölö) The consular section is to the left of the embassy's front gate.

France (☎ 011-324 519; www.ambafrance-mn.org in French; Apt 48, Diplomatic Services Corps Bldg 95)

Germany (☎ 011-323 325; fax 011-312 118; Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj 7)

Japan (☎ 011-320 777, 313 332; Olympiin Gudamj 6)

Russia (☎ 011-326 836; fax 011-327 018; Peace Ave A6)

UK (☎ 011-458 133; britemb@magicnet.mn; Peace Ave 30)

USA (☎ 011-329 095; www.us-mongolia.com; Ikh

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FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For our selection of the top 10 festivals to attend while travelling along the Trans-Siberian routes, see p15.

January

Russian Orthodox Christmas (Rozhdestvo) On 7 January; begins with midnight church services.

February, March & April

Chinese New Year/Spring Festival Be warned: this is China's biggest holiday and all transport and hotels are booked solid. Although the demand for accommodation skyrockets, many hotels close down at this time and prices rise steeply. If you can't avoid being in China at this time, then book your room in advance and sit tight until the chaos is over. The Chinese New Year will fall on the following dates: 18 February 2007, 7 February 2008 and 26 January 2009.

Easter (Paskha) The main festival of the Orthodox Church year, in March or April. Easter Day begins with celebratory midnight services. Afterwards, people eat *kulichy* (dome-shaped cakes) and *paskha* (curd cakes), and may exchange painted wooden Easter eggs. The devout deny themselves meat, milk, alcohol and sex during Lent's 40-day pre-Easter fasting period.

Guanyin's Birthday The birthday of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, is a fine time to visit China's Buddhist temples, many of which have halls dedicated to the divinity. Guanyin's birthday is the 19th day of the second moon and will fall on the following dates: 6 April 2007 and 26 March 2008.

Ice Festival Held at Khövsgöl Lake, Mongolia, near the border with Russia on 19 to 20 February. This is another chance (besides the Ice Lantern Festival in Harbin) to enter a winter wonderland of ice sculptures.

Lantern Festival This festival in China is not a public holiday, but it is very colourful. People make (or buy) paper lanterns and walk around the streets in the evening holding them. It falls on the 15th day of the first moon, and will be celebrated on the following dates: 5 March 2007, 22 February 2008 and 9 February 2009.

Pancake Week (Maslenitsa) Folk shows and games in Russia celebrate the end of winter, with lots of pancake-eating before Lent (pancakes were a pagan symbol of the sun). Held late February and/or early March.

Tibetan Buddhist New Year (Tsagaalgaan) A moveable feast lasting 16 days, Tsagaalgaan celebrates the lunar new year and hence advances by about 10 days annually. It's mainly celebrated at family level in Buryatiya (p213).

Winteriada: International Baikal Nordic Games Festival (www.winteriada.ru) Winter games festival held near Irkutsk from February to March.

May

Graduates Day A day for those finishing school in Russia, who parade about their hometowns in traditional student garb; traditionally held on 25 May.

June

Roaring Hoofs International Live Music Festival (www.roaringhoofs.de) Lively music and performing arts

festival. Has been held in June and July in Ulaanbaatar in the past, but check the website for up-to-date information.

September & October

Birthday of Confucius The great sage has his birthday on 28 September. This is an interesting time to visit Beijing's Confucian Temple (p285).

Mid-Autumn Festival Also known as the Moon Festival; this is the time to gaze at the moon and eat tasty *yue bing* (moon cakes); it's also a traditional holiday for lovers. The festival takes place on the 15th day of the eighth moon, and will be celebrated on 6 October 2006, 25 September 2007, 14 September 2008 and 3 October 2009.

November

National Reconciliation Day The old Great October Socialist Revolution Anniversary in Russia – still a big day for Communist Party marches. Otherwise, monarchists mourn and others drink while closing down their dachas for winter. Held on 7 November.

December

Sylvester and New Year The main winter and gift-giving festival in Russia, when gifts are put under the *yolka* (traditional fir tree). See out the old year with vodka and welcome in the new one with champagne while listening to the Kremlin chimes on TV. Held on 31 December and 1 January.

Russian Winter Festival Features tourist-oriented troika rides and folklore performances at Irkutsk through into January.

FOOD

Dining options across Russia have improved immeasurably in recent years and you should have little problem in most parts of the country finding somewhere or something decent to eat. In general for a budget meal you'll be looking at R100 or less, a midrange place will cost around R500 and top-end places over R1000.

There's a fantastic array of food available in China, and particularly so in Beijing. Even in the capital it's still possible to dine at budget eateries for under Y30; midrange dining options will cost between Y30 and Y80, and top-end choices over Y80.

Mongolia isn't going to get many awards for its culinary offerings, although Ulaanbaatar has some surprisingly good places to eat. Expect main dishes to cost T800 to T1500 in budget joints, T2000 to T3000 in midrange places and T4000 to T8000 in most top-end restaurants.

For more on food and drink in all three countries, see p66.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Russia While girls holding hands and drunken men showing affection towards each other are common sights throughout Russia, open displays of same-sex love are not condoned. In general, however, the idea of homosexuality is tolerated (particularly by the urban younger generation), although overt gay behaviour is frowned upon.

There is an active gay and lesbian scene in Moscow and St Petersburg, and newspapers such as the *Moscow Times* and *St Petersburg Times* feature articles and listings on gay and lesbian issues, clubs and bars and events (but don't expect anything near as organised as you might find in other major world centres). Away from the two major cities, the gay scene is much less open.

For a good overview, visit www.gay.ru/english, with up-to-date information, good links and a resource to put you in touch with personal guides for Moscow and St Petersburg. St Petersburg's **Krilija** (Wings; ☎ 812-312 3180; www.krilija.sp.ru) is Russia's oldest officially registered gay and lesbian community organisation.

China & Mongolia

In China, greater tolerance of homosexuality exists in the big cities than in the more conservative countryside. Still, even in urban China it's not recommended that gays and lesbians be too open about their sexual orientation in public, even though you will see Chinese same-sex friends holding hands or putting their arms around each other. The situation is slowly improving, but the police periodically crack down on gay meeting places.

Mongolia is not a gay-friendly place, nor one to test local attitudes towards homosexuality. Ulaanbaatar has a small gay community that will occasionally convene at a tolerant restaurant or bar, but it moves around every few months, so you'll need to quietly tap into the scene and ask.

For up-to-date information on the latest gay and lesbian hot spots in Beijing and Ulaanbaatar look at the website www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm.

HOLIDAYS

Russia

New Year's Day 1 January
Russian Orthodox Christmas Day 7 January

Defenders of the Motherland Day 23 February

Easter Monday

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day (Spring Festival) 1 and 2 May

Victory Day 9 May

Russian Independence Day 12 June; celebrates the day the Russian republic inside the USSR proclaimed its sovereignty in June 1991

Unity Day 4 November

Many businesses are closed from 1 January to 5 January.

China

New Year's Day 1 January

Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) Usually February

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day 1 May

Youth Day 4 May

International Children's Day 1 June

Birthday of the Chinese Communist Party 1 July

Anniversary of the Founding of the People's

Liberation Army 1 August

National Day 1 October

International Labour Day is a week-long holiday, as is National Day. Chinese New Year is also a week-long holiday for many. It's not a great idea to arrive in China or go travelling during these holidays as things tend to grind to a halt. Hotel prices all over China rapidly shoot up during the May and October holiday periods.

Mongolia

Shin Jil (New Year's Day) 1 January

Constitution Day 13 January; the adoption of the 1992 constitution

Tsagaan Sar (Lunar New Year) January/February; a three-day holiday celebrating the Mongolian New Year

Women's Day 8 March

Mother & Children's Day 1 June; a great time to visit parks

National Day Celebrations (Naadam Festival) 11 to 12 July

Mongolian Republic Day 26 November

Constitution Day, Women's Day and Mongolian Republic Day are generally normal working days.

INSURANCE

It's wise to take out travel insurance to cover theft, loss and medical problems. There are many policies available, so check the small

print for things like ambulance cover or an emergency flight home. Note: some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can apply to scuba diving, motorcycling and trekking.

You may prefer the policy to pay doctors or hospitals directly, rather than you paying on the spot and claiming later (if you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation). Some policies ask you to phone back (reverse charge) to a call centre in your home country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

INTERNET ACCESS

For recommended websites, see p19.

Russia

Internet cafés are common across Russia – all but the smallest towns have connections. The best place to start is the main post office or telephone office, as they often have the cheapest rates, typically around R28.80 an hour.

Wi-fi is becoming more common, particularly in Moscow and St Petersburg where several bars and regular cafés have it, as well as many top-end hotels. Go to www.intel.com/products/services/emea/rus/mobiletechnology/unwire/hotspots.htm (in Russian) for a listing of wi-fi hotspots in the major cities.

China

Chinese may be the world's largest online language by 2007, but the authorities have closed scores of *wangba* (Internet cafés) after a fire in a Beijing Internet café in 2002 killed 25 people. Cafés that are allowed to operate have to use filters to strain out 'irregular' content. Rates at China's Internet cafés should be around Y2 to Y3 per hour for a standard, no-frills outlet, but comfier and smarter options naturally charge more (up to Y20 per hour). You may have to endure agonisingly slow connections in China's Internet cafés, especially on congested sites such as Hotmail.

To access the Internet using a laptop from your hotel room (if it has no broadband Internet connection), you can use free dial-up access by hooking up through the phone line and using the local dial-up number (usually 163 or 169, but ask your hotel what the local number is). Use the same number for the account name and password, and you can get online.

RUSSIAN STREET NAMES

We use the Russian names of all streets and squares in this book to help you when deciphering Cyrillic signs and asking locals the way. To save space the following abbreviations are used:

- bul – bulvar бульвар – boulevard
- nab – naberezhnaya набережная – embankment
- per – pereulok переулок – side street
- pl – ploshchad площадь – square
- pr – prospekt проспект – avenue
- ul – ulitsa улица – street
- sh – shosse шоссе – road

Mongolia

You'll find Internet cafés on nearly every street in downtown Ulaanbaatar; the standard charge is T800 per hour. Some hotel business centres and guesthouses have Internet access for guests, but prices are more expensive. If you have your own laptop it's easier to get an Internet card (sold at the exchange kiosks in the State Department Store, Peace Ave 44, Ulaanbaatar). A 10-hour Internet card costs just T5000.

LAUNDRY

While self-service laundries are almost unheard of in Russia, you can get laundry done in most hotels: ask the floor attendant. It usually takes at least a day and costs around R200 a load, but if you plan on doing it yourself, bring along a universal sink plug. There are several laundries scattered around Ulaanbaatar, where a load will cost around T4000.

LEGAL MATTERS

In Russia, and to a lesser extent in Mongolia, it's generally best to avoid contact with the police. Some are known to bolster their puny incomes by robbing foreigners – either outright or through sham 'fines'. If you do need police assistance (ie you've been the victim of a robbery or an assault) it's best to go to a station with a local for both language and moral support. You will have to be persistent and patient, too.

If you are arrested, the police in all three countries are obliged to inform your embassy or consulate immediately and allow you to communicate with it without delay. Although you can insist on seeing an embassy or consular official straight away, you can't count on the rules being followed, so

be polite and respectful towards officials and hopefully things will go far more smoothly for you. In Russian, the phrase 'I'd like to call my embassy' is '*Pozhaluysta, ya khotel by pozvonit v posolstvo moyey strany*'.

MAPS

Maps of all the major cities covered in this guide are on sale in each city, although in general you'll be best off buying regional city and area maps of Russia in Moscow or St Petersburg before you start.

Good overseas sources for maps:

Librairie Ulysse (☎ 01 43 25 17 35; www.ulysse.fr; 26 rue Saint Louis en L'Isle, Paris, France)

Mapland (☎ 03-9670 4383; www.mapland.com.au; 372 Little Bourke St, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia)

Map Link (☎ 800-962-1394; www.maplink.com; Unit 5, 30 S La Patera Lane, Santa Barbara, CA, USA)

Stanfords Map Centre (☎ 020-7836 0189; www.stanfords.co.uk; 12-14 Long Acre, London, UK)

Travel Bookshop (☎ 02-9261 8200; www.travelbooks.com.au; Shop 3, 175 Liverpool St, Sydney, NSW, Australia)

MONEY

Consult the inside front cover for a table of exchange rates. For information on costs, see p17.

The Russian currency is the rouble (*ru-bl*), which is written as 'рубль' or abbreviated as 'py' or 'p' and is made up of 100 kopecks. These come in coin denominations of one (rarely seen), five, 10 and 50. Also issued in coins, roubles come in amounts of one, two and five, with banknotes in values of 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 roubles.

In Russia, it's illegal to make purchases in any currency other than roubles. Prices are often quoted in dollars (or the pseudonym 'units', often written as 'ye' – the abbrevia-

tion for *uslovnyye yedenitsy*, conventional units), since dollars have a more stable exchange rate, but you will still be presented with a final bill in roubles. In this guide we list whichever currency is quoted on the ground.

The Chinese currency is the Renminbi (RMB), or 'People's Money'. Formally the basic unit of RMB is the *yuán*, which is divided into 10 *jiào*, which is again divided into 10 *fēn*. Colloquially, the *yuán* is referred to as *kuài* and *jiào* as *máo*. The *fēn* has so little value these days that it is rarely used.

The Bank of China issues RMB bills in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 *yuán*. Coins come in denominations of one *yuán*, five *jiào*, one *jiào* and five *fēn*. Paper versions of the coins remain in circulation.

The Mongolian unit of currency is the *tögrög* (T), which comes in notes of T5, T10, T20, T50, T100, T500, T1000, T5000 and T10,000 (T1 notes are basically souvenirs). There are also T50 and T100 coins. The highest-value note is worth around US\$9 so when changing a lot of cash you'll be given a stack of machine-collated bills.

ATMs

Plastic is the way to go with ATMs, linked to international networks such as Amex, Cirrus, MasterCard and Visa, common right across Russia – look for signs that say *bankomat* (БАHKOMAT). As well as roubles, some ATMs dispense US dollars, too.

It's also pretty easy to find ATMs accepting overseas cards in Beijing and Harbin, although in Ulaanbaatar the ATMs currently only accept Visa cards.

If you are going to rely on ATMs, make certain you have a few days' supply of cash at hand in case you can't find a machine to accept your card.

Cash

There are no official facilities for exchanging money on the train itself (it's possible some of the *provodnitsas* or the restaurant staff will accept foreign cash but at very poor exchange rates – don't count on this), so you'll need to stock up at your major stops. There are usually exchange places at border-town train stations.

You'll usually get the best exchange rates for US dollars though euros are increas-

ingly widely accepted and in rare cases get even better rates in bigger cities where there's a specialist bank. British pounds are sometimes accepted in big cities, but the exchange rates are not so good; other currencies incur abysmal rates and are often virtually unchangeable.

Any currency you bring should be in pristine condition: banks and exchange bureaux do not accept old, tatty bills with rips or tears. For US dollars make certain they are the new design, with the large offset portrait, and that they look and smell newly minted.

Credit Cards

Across Russia and China credit cards are becoming more accepted, but don't rely on them outside of the major cities. Most sizable cities have banks or exchange bureaux that will give you a cash advance on your credit card, but be prepared for paperwork in the local language.

In Mongolia credit cards are often accepted at top-end hotels, the expensive souvenir shops, airline offices and travel agencies. The Trade & Development Bank in Ulaanbaatar can arrange a US dollar cash advance on your Visa, MasterCard and American Express. Plastic is not accepted outside the capital.

Moneychangers

There's no advantage to using moneychangers in either Russia or China, but in Mongolia they sometimes offer good rates for US dollars and are usually safe. However, the risks are obvious. Remember to change all your *tögrög* when leaving the country as it's worthless elsewhere.

Tippling

In Russia, tipping is standard in the better restaurants – count on leaving 10% – whereas elsewhere 5% to 10% of the total is fine. Tipping your guide, if you have one, is an accepted practice. Generally about US\$5 to US\$10 is OK.

Tipping is neither required nor expected in China, except in the case of porters in upmarket hotels. In Mongolia, tipping is optional; if you round up the bill, then your server will be satisfied.

Travellers Cheques

These are worth taking with you if you are only going to be getting off the train in large

cities. The exchange rates might be more favourable than the rate for cash. However, you should always check whether there are any exchange fees incurred.

PHOTOGRAPHY

All major towns and cities will have several photographic shops to download digital snaps to CDs, buy memory cards and major brands of print film. Slide film is not widely sold so bring plenty of rolls with you. The same rare specialist shops that sell slide film will also have a smattering of camera gear by leading brands such as Nikon and Canon.

Camera batteries get sluggish in the cold, so carry your camera inside your coat and keep spare batteries warm in your pocket. For more professional tips on taking decent photos, read Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*, by Richard T'Anson.

Photographing People

As anywhere, use good judgement and discretion when taking photos of people. It's always better to ask first and if the person doesn't want to be photographed, respect their privacy; a lifetime living with the KGB may make older people uneasy about being photographed, although a genuine offer to send on a copy can loosen your subject up. Remember that many people will be touchy if you photograph 'embarrassments' such as drunks, run-down housing and other signs of social decay.

In Russian, 'May I take a photograph of you?' is '*Mozhno vas s'fotografirovat?*', and in Mongolian it is '*Bi tany zurgiiг avch bolokh uu?*'

Restrictions

In all three countries (but especially in Russia), you should be particularly careful about taking photographs of stations, official-looking buildings and any type of military/security structure – if in doubt, don't snap! Travellers, including an author of this book, have been arrested for such innocent behaviour.

Some museums and galleries forbid flash pictures, some ban all photos and most will charge you extra to snap away. Some caretakers in historical buildings and churches charge mercilessly for the privilege of using a still or video camera.

POST

If there is a mail car attached to the train, there will be a slot in the side into which you can drop letters. However, there's no guarantee that your mail will reach its destination, so it's best to post things from cities along the way or in post boxes at the stations.

The major Russian cities, plus Beijing and Ulaanbaatar, have international private courier firms such as **FedEx** (www.fedex.com) and **UPS** (www.ups.com).

Russia

Russia's main post offices are open 8am to 8pm or 9pm, with shorter hours on Saturday and Sunday; in big cities one office will possibly stay open 24 hours a day. Outward post is slow but fairly reliable. Airmail letters take two to three weeks from Moscow and St Petersburg to the UK, longer from other Russian cities, and three to four weeks to the USA or Australasia. To send a postcard/letter to anywhere in the world costs R10/14.

Incoming mail is unreliable and anything addressed to poste restante should be considered lost before it's sent. Should you decide to send mail to Russia or to receive it, note that addresses should be written in reverse order: Russia, postal code (if known), city, street address, name.

China

The Chinese postal system is efficient: airmail to Europe and North America takes about one week. It is possible to post your letters from most hotels, as well as at the post office. Packages, however, should be sent from the **International Post Office** (Guoji Yóudiànjú; Jianguomen Beidajie; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) in Beijing. Officials there do inspect all parcels, so don't wrap and seal them until after inspection.

Large post offices are generally open 9am to 5pm daily. Postcards to overseas destinations cost Y4.20. Airmail letters up to 20g cost Y5.40 to Y6.40 to all countries except Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan (Y2.50). Domestic letters cost Y0.80 and postcards Y0.30.

Mongolia

The postal service is reliable but can often be very slow. Allow at least a couple of weeks for letters and postcards to arrive home from Mongolia. Foreign residents of Ulaanbaatar find it much faster to give

letters (and cash to buy stamps) to other foreigners who are departing.

In most cases, you will have to post your letters from the post office. Postal rates are often relatively expensive, especially for parcels, for which there is only an 'airmail' rate – yet they often arrive months later (probably by sea). Normal-sized letters cost T640 and postcards cost T460 to all countries.

SHOPPING

See the destination sections of the route chapters earlier in this guide for details on where to shop.

Apart from in tourist-orientated souvenir markets bargaining is not the done thing in Russia. Even when it is expected, it will not be a protracted process as in parts of Asia. In China and Mongolia, in large shops and department stores where prices are clearly marked, there is usually no latitude for bargaining (but if you ask, the staff sometimes might be able to give you a small discount). Elsewhere bargaining is expected.

In all three countries the one important rule to follow is: be polite. Your goal should be to pay the local price, as opposed to the foreigners' price – if you can do that, you've done well.

Russia

The classic Russian souvenir is a *matryoshka* (set of wooden dolls stacked within dolls). Although often kitsch, they're a true folk art, and there are all manner of intricate painted designs. A small, mass-produced set should cost just a couple of dollars, but the best examples may set you back US\$100. For this price you can also take along a family photo to Izmaylovsky Park in Moscow and come back the following week to collect your very own personalised *matryoshka* set.

Other items to look out for:

- *Palekh* – enamelled wooden boxes, each with an intricate scene painted in its lid
- *Khokhloma* ware – the gold, red and black wooden bowls, mugs and spoons from near Nizhny Novgorod (p134)
- *Gzhel* – blue-and-white ornamental china
- *Platok Pavlovo Posad* – the floral-designed 'Babushka scarf'
- *Yantar* – amber from the Baltic coast, though beware of fake stuff in some St Petersburg and Moscow outlets

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE...

Once upon a time in China you got what you paid for. If the sales clerk said it was top-quality jade, then it was top-quality jade. Times have changed, and cheap forgeries and imitations of everything from Qing coins to the latest movie DVDs now flood the market.

Despite all the government's bluster and periodic CCTV footage of steamrollers grinding fake Rolexes and CDs, the pirating industry is in fine fettle. Fake goods just reappear in force after hitting the deck for a while. Wherever you voyage in China, you'll be cursing the number of forgeries, then snapping them up when you glance at the price tag. Just make sure your change doesn't include a counterfeit note. And if you are after genuine antiques, try to get an official certificate of verification – and make sure the ink is dry.

Russian records and cassettes – rock, jazz, classical – are cheap. For the same price you can get all manner of pirated CDs, video cassettes and software – just don't expect any of them to be of decent quality. Other ideas include paintings from the street; *plakat* (posters), both old Socialist exhortation and modern social commentary, from bookshops or specialist poster shops; and little Lenin busts at street stands and in tourist markets.

China

Although tourists are unlikely to find true antiques at bargain prices, China is still a great place to buy handmade arts and crafts and furniture. Even if the seller claims it is old, it is more likely a reproduction, but that does not mean that it is not a good buy. Most Chinese markets are chock-full of exquisite traditional furniture, iron teapots, bronze figures and Tibetan carpets, most of which are sold at prices considerably lower than in the West. Shoppers can get fantastic bargains on jewellery, especially pearls. Silk is high-quality and priced low compared to material you can buy in the West. China also offers an impressive selection of fake brand-name clothing and pirated CDs and DVDs for very cheap prices.

Mongolia

Mongolian crafts are made almost exclusively for tourist consumption, and they are expensive. Some potentially good buys are traditional Mongolian clothing and boots, landscape paintings and Mongolian games such as *khonor* (checkers) and *shagai* (dice). Cashmere sweaters are an important export item, but they are usually overpriced, especially for the limited selection. Traditional musical instruments can be a beautiful and unique memento of a trip.

TELEPHONE & FAX

City codes are listed in this book under the relevant section headings. In all three countries faxes can be sent from most post offices and the better hotels.

Russia

The country code for Russia is ☎ 7.

Local calls from homes and most hotels are free. To make a long-distance call from most phones first dial ☎ 8, wait for a second dial tone, then dial the city code etc. To make an international call dial ☎ 8, wait for a second dial tone, then dial 10, then the country code etc. See below for details of future changes to this system, though. Some phones are for local calls only and won't give you that second dial tone.

From mobile phones, just dial + followed by the country code to place an international call.

MOBILE PHONES

Russia has several large cross-country networks, including Beeline, Megafon, MTS and Skylink, most of which operate on the

CHANGING TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Russian authorities have an annoying habit of frequently changing telephone numbers, particularly in cities. We've tried to list the correct telephone number at the time of research but it's likely that some will change during the lifetime of this book. There are plans to change city codes that start with 0, generally substituting 4 for the initial 0. This is because in 2007/2008 inter-city and international connection codes will be changed to 0 and 00 respectively (from the current 8 and 8 + 10).

pay-as-you-go system. However, beware that depending on the SIM card that you opt for, you might only be able to call from local parts of the network. Reception is increasingly spreading to more rural areas and is already available right along the Trans-Siberian Railway. MTS probably had the widest network at the time of research.

To call a mobile phone from a landline, the line must be enabled to make paid (ie nonlocal) calls. SIM and phone call credit top-up cards, available at any mobile phone shop and costing as little as US\$15, can be slotted into your home handset during your stay. Call prices are very low within local networks, but charges for roaming larger regions can mount up, and cost-conscious locals switch SIM cards when crossing regional boundaries.

PAY PHONES

Taksofon (pay phones, ТАКСОФОН) are located throughout most cities, and are usually in working order. Most take prepaid phone-cards. There are several types of cardphones, and not all cards are interchangeable. Card-phones can be used for local and domestic or international long-distance calls.

PHONECARDS & CALL CENTRES

Local *telefonnaya karta* (phonecards), in a variety of units, are available from shops, kiosks and metro stations in Moscow and St Petersburg, and can be used to make local, national and international calls.

Sometimes better value for international calls is a call centre, where you give the clerk the number you want to call, pay a deposit and then go to the booth you are assigned to make the call. Afterwards you either pay the difference or collect your change. Such call centres are common in Russian cities and towns – ask for *mezhdunarodny telefon*.

China

The country code for China is ☎ 86.

If calling internationally from China, drop the first zero of the area or city code after dialling the international access code, and then dial the number you wish to call. Local calls from hotel-room phones are generally cheap (and sometimes free), although international phone calls are expensive; it's best to use a phonecard.

MOBILE PHONES

Shoujidian (mobile-phone shops) can sell you a SIM card which will cost around Y200; you then buy credits on the following denominations of cards: Y50, Y100, Y300 and Y500 (each valid for a limited period). It's possible to do all this before even leaving Beijing airport!

Local and long-distance calls are pretty cheap. Overseas calls can be made for Y4.80 per minute plus the local charge per minute by dialling ☎ 17951, followed by 00, the country code then the number you want to call. Otherwise you will be charged the IDD call charge plus six *jiào* per minute.

PAY PHONES

Public telephones are plentiful, although finding one that works can be a hassle. The majority of public telephones take IC cards (see below) and only a few take coins. If making a domestic call, look out for public phones at newspaper stands and hole-in-the-wall shops; you make your call and then pay the owner (local calls are typically around four *jiào*). Domestic and international long-distance phone calls can also be made from main telecommunications offices.

PHONECARDS

There are two main types of prepaid phone-cards: Integrated Circuit (IC) cards, best used for local and long-distance calls, and Internet Phone (IP) cards, best for international calls. Both are sold at kiosks, shops, Internet cafés and China Telecom offices and come in a variety of denominations from Y20 to Y200. Note some cards can only be used in Beijing (or locally, depending on where the card is purchased), while other cards can be used throughout China.

Purchasing the correct card can be confusing, as the instructions for use on the reverse of the card are usually only in Chinese.

With an IP card, you dial a local number, then punch in your account number, followed by a pin number and finally the number you wish to call. English-language service is usually available.

Mongolia

The country code for Mongolia is ☎ 976.

If you are calling out of Mongolia, and are using an IDD phone, just dial ☎ 00 and then your international country code. On

non-IDD phones you can make direct long-distance calls by dialling the international operator (☎ 106), who may know enough English to make the right connection (but don't count on it).

The other options are making a call from a private international phone office (Olon Ulisiin Yariin), which are becoming common in Ulaanbaatar but not in other cities. These charge reasonable rates to call abroad. To make the call, you need to pay a deposit in advance (a minimum equivalent of three minutes). The most expensive, but often the most hassle-free, option is to call from the business centres or reception desks at top-end hotels.

MOBILE PHONES

Sotovyte telefonny (mobile phones) are now ubiquitous in the capital, as Muscovites bypassed the antiquated landline system. The two main companies are Mobicom and Skytel. The mobile-phone network is GSM. If you bring a GSM phone you can get a new SIM card installed in Mongolia. The process is simple – just go to a mobile-phone office (a Mobicom office is conveniently located on the 3rd floor of the State Department Store, Peace Ave 44, Ulaanbaatar), sign up for basic service (around T15,000), and buy units as needed. Cards come in units of 10 (T2500), 30 (T6600), 50 (T10,250) and 100 (T19,000). It is free to receive calls and text messaging charges are almost negligible.

If you are abroad, and calling a mobile-phone number in Mongolia, just dial the country code (☎ 976) without the area code. Note that you drop the '0' off the area code if dialling an Ulaanbaatar number from a mobile phone but you retain the '0' if using other area codes.

PHONECARDS

International phonecards are sold in various outlets including the post office, the State Department Store or mobile-phone shops. The Personal Identification Number (PIN) for these cards is the last four digits of the code on the card. There are a variety of phonecards available, and you usually get what you pay for – the cheaper ones (such as Bodicom) have terrible sound quality and echo, but cost less than US\$0.10 per minute.

TIME

No one on the train knew what time it was. Some people said the train travelled on Moscow time but operated on local time, if you can figure that out. But half the people were on Beijing time and one diplomat said he was on Tokyo time, which was the same for some reason as Ulaanbaatar time. Our Chinese porter changed his watch 15 minutes every few hours or so but this was a system of his own devising.

Mary Morris, Wall to Wall

One of the most disorienting aspects of a Trans-Siberian trip is working out what time it is. The important thing to remember is that all long-distance trains run on Moscow time – so check carefully when you buy a ticket exactly what time *locally* you should be at the station. Once inside the station and on the train all clocks are set to Moscow time.

In the guide we list how far major cities and towns are ahead of Moscow time, eg 'Moscow + 5hr' means five hours ahead.

From the early hours of the last Sunday in September to the early hours of the last Sunday in March, Moscow and St Petersburg time is GMT/UTC plus three hours. From the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in September, 'summer time' is in force and it's GMT/UTC plus four hours.

Most of European Russia is in the same time zone as Moscow and St Petersburg. The exception along the Trans-Siberian route is Perm, which is two hours ahead of Moscow. East of the Ural Mountains, Yekaterinburg is on Moscow time plus two hours, Irkutsk on Moscow time plus five hours and Vladivostok on Moscow time plus seven hours.

All of China is on Beijing's clock, which is eight hours ahead of GMT. Daylight-savings time was abandoned in 1992, so the time difference with Europe and the USA is reduced by one hour during the summer months.

Mongolia is divided into two time zones. Most of the country, including Ulaanbaatar, is GMT plus eight hours, so it is the same time zone as Beijing except during the summer when it's one hour ahead.

TOILETS

It's rare that paper will actually be available in the stalls of public toilets, so always bring a supply of toilet paper or tissue with

you. Plumbing systems in all three countries often have problems digesting toilet paper. If there is a rubbish basket next to the toilet, this is where the paper should go.

Russia

Pay toilets are identified by the words платный туалет (*platny tualet*). In any toilet Ж (*zhensky*) stands for women's, while М (*muzhskoy*) stands for men's.

In cities, you'll now find clusters of temporary plastic toilets in popular public places, although other public toilets are rare and often dingy and uninviting. A much better option are the loos in major hotels or in modern food outlets. In all public toilets, the attendant who you pay your R5 to R10 to can provide miserly rations of toilet paper.

China & Mongolia

Public toilets in hotels, *ger* camps and restaurants are usually European-style, moderately clean facilities. On the other hand, public facilities in parks, stores and train stations usually require that you squat over a smelly hole. In China you'll also come across toilets without doors and separated only by a low partition, making it easy to strike up a conversation with the person squatting next to you.

Along the Route

Toilets on Russian and Mongolian trains are the Western variety, although you'll notice when you lift the seat that the bowl rim is also designed for those who would prefer to squat rather than sit. The *provodnitsas* generally do a good job of keeping the toilets reasonably clean, particularly on the more prestigious class of trains.

It is also important to remember that shortly before and after any major stops, and along any densely populated stretches of the line, the toilets will be locked; a timetable for this is usually posted on the toilet door.

On Chinese trains toilets are often of the squat variety.

TOURIST INFORMATION**Russia**

Tourist offices like you may be used to elsewhere are few and far between in Russia. Along the Trans-Siberian routes the only places we've found them are St Petersburg (p84), Irkutsk (p191) and Olkhon (p203).

HOW TO HAVE A TRANS-SIBERIAN SHOWER *Steve Noble*

Travellers often moan about not being able to shower on trains. But what is your definition of a shower? If it's high pressure hot/cold water in an elegantly tiled bathroom, you will not find this. However, if you are resourceful, adaptable and imaginative, you can shower as much as you like in the toilet/washroom at the end of each *kupe* (*kupeyny*; compartmentalised) carriage. Some people are happy for just an APC (armpits and crotch) wash, others prefer to splash water a little more liberally. Here are some proven methods I have tried:

- Stab lots of small holes in the bottom of a plastic (0.5L or 1L) bottle, just like your shower head at home. Fill it with water and either hold it with one hand and wash or tie some rope around the bottle neck and hook it on the back of the door. Use one bottle to wet yourself and one bottle to rinse off.
- Any size cup or bottle can be filled with water and thrown liberally over yourself.
- Use a collapsible plastic shower bag with showerhead and tap, for sale in any good camping store.
- Attach a small length of rubber hose to the tap.
- Use a sponge or quick-dry towels to have a sponge bath.

If you want hot water, get some from the samovar before you enter the toilet. Check the floor drain is unplugged before you start to shower and remember to wipe the walls down after you're done. You don't want to leave a mess and upset the *provodnitsa*!

Elsewhere you're mainly dependent for information on the moods of hotel receptionists and administrators, service bureaus and travel firms. The latter two exist primarily to sell accommodation, excursions and transport – if you don't look like you want to book something, staff may or may not answer questions.

Russia has no overseas tourist offices and most of its consulates and embassies have little practical information. Travel agencies specialising in Russian travel (p325) can be useful.

China

While Beijing's tourist information structure is improving, on the whole tourist information facilities in China are largely rudimentary and of little use for travellers. In the absence of a national tourism board, individual provinces, cities, towns and regions promote tourism independently. The fallback position is the China International Travel Service (CITS) with branches in all major towns and cities. There is usually a member of staff who can speak English who may be able to answer questions and offer some travel advice, but the main purpose of CITS is to get you onto an expensive tour.

Mongolia

Ulaanbaatar has a reasonably good tourist information centre; see p260. Juulchin, once Mongolia's sole tourist agency, has been privatised. It's still the biggest operator, though.

VISAS

It's highly advisable to obtain all visas in your home country before setting out. Some tour companies can arrange your visas as part of their package. Remember if you're also travelling through Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic countries or Central Asia, you may need visas for those countries, too.

Russia

Everyone needs a visa to visit Russia and it's likely to be your biggest single headache if you run into complications, so allow yourself at least a month before you travel to secure one. There are several types of visa, but for most Trans-Siberian travellers a tourist visa, valid for 30 days from the date of entry, will be sufficient. If you plan to stay longer, it's best to apply for a business visa. The good news is that these days getting a visa is, usually (but not always), a straightforward process. The process has three stages – invitation, application and registration.

INVITATION

To obtain a visa, you first need an invitation. Hotels and hostels will usually issue an invitation (or 'visa support') to anyone staying with them for free or for a small fee (typically around US\$30). If you are not staying in a hotel or hostel, you will need to buy an invitation. This can be done through most travel agents and online through websites such as www.waytorussia.com and www.expresstorussia.com, which can both also help arrange invitation letters for business visas (see right).

APPLICATION

Invitation in hand you can then apply for a visa at any Russian embassy. Costs vary – anything from US\$20 to US\$200 – depending on the type of visa applied for and how quickly you need it. Russian embassies are practically laws unto themselves, each with different fees and slightly different application rules; to avoid potential hassles, check well in advance what these might be. It's also best to apply for your visa in your home country rather than on the road; Trans-Mongolian and Trans-Manchurian travellers should note that getting visas for Russia in both Beijing and Ulaanbaatar can be a frustrating, costly and ultimately fruitless exercise.

REGISTRATION

On arrival in Russia, you will need to fill out an immigration card – a long white form issued at passport control throughout the country. You surrender one half of the form immediately to passport control, while the other you keep for the duration of your stay and give up only on exiting Russia. Take good care of this as you'll need it for registration and could face problems while travelling in Russia, and certainly will upon leaving, if you cannot produce it.

You must register your visa within three working days of arrival. Registration essentially means a stamp on the immigration card by your hotel or hostel. Note that the very cheapest places sometimes can't oblige. If staying in nonhotel accommodation, you'll need to pay a travel agency (about US\$30) to register it for you (most will do this through a hotel). Every time you move city or town and stay for more

than three days it's necessary to get another stamp on the immigration card. There's no need to be overly paranoid about this but the more stamps you have on the card the safer. Keep all train tickets (especially if you spend nights sleeping on trains) to prove to any overzealous policemen exactly when you arrived in a new place.

Registrations are regularly checked in Moscow by the fine-hungry cops who lurk around train stations and other places hoping to catch tourists too hurried or disorganised to be able to keep their registration up to date.

TYPES OF VISAS

Apart from the tourist visa, there are other types of visa that could be useful to travellers.

Business Visa

This is far more flexible and desirable for the independent traveller. These can be issued for three months, six months or two years, and are available as single-entry, double-entry or multiple-entry visas. To obtain a business visa you must have a letter of invitation from a registered Russian company guaranteeing to provide accommodation during the entire length of your stay, and a covering letter from your company (or you) stating the purpose of your trip. **Way to Russia** (www.waytorussia.net) and **Express to Russia** (www.expresstorussia.com) can arrange this for you.

Transit Visa

If you're taking a nonstop Trans-Siberian journey this visa is valid for 10 days, giving westbound passengers a few days in Moscow; those heading east, however, are not allowed to linger in Moscow.

VISA EXTENSIONS & CHANGES

The Interior Ministry's passport and visa agency is called the *passportno-vizovoye upravleniy* (PVU), although you'll still often hear the old acronym OVIR used. It's to this agency that you must apply if you wish to extend or change your visa.

Visa extensions are time-consuming, if not downright difficult; tourist visas can't be extended at all. Try to avoid the need for an extension by asking for a longer visa than you think you might need. Note that many trains out of St Petersburg and Mos-

VISA AGENCIES

If you're really pressed for time, or badly affected by impersonal bureaucracies, there are agencies that specialise in getting visas. In the USA, try **Zierer Visa Service** (☎ 866-788-1100; www.zvs.com) which has offices in Chicago, Houston, New York, San Francisco and Washington DC, as well as the UK, France, Germany and Australia.

Also in the UK, **Thames Consular Services** (☎ 020-7494 4957; www.visapassport.com; 3rd fl, 35 Piccadilly, London) charges from £50, plus value added tax (VAT), on top of the Russian visa fees.

cow to Eastern Europe cross the border after midnight, so make sure your visa is valid up to and including this day. Don't give border guards any excuses for making trouble.

China

All foreigners need to get a visa to visit the People's Republic of China (PRC). Your passport should have at least six months' validity and one empty page. Submit your passport, a covering letter, an application, one passport photo and a money order for the appropriate fee. Processing should take four working days for a walk-in application; by mail requires more time and usually a higher fee.

Be aware that you must submit these documents to the consulate whose jurisdiction includes the state or city where you reside. Exact requirements and fees vary depending on where you apply, so be sure to check the details with your nearest Chinese consulate.

A standard visa is valid for one entry and a 30-day stay in China. A double entry is fairly straightforward. You can also get a transit visa, which is good for seven days. Requirements are more stringent for multiple entries or for longer stays in China.

Visa extensions, which are relatively easy to get, are the domain of the Public Security Bureau's (PSB) Foreign Affairs Branch. In Beijing, **PSB** (☎ 010-8402 0101; 2 Andingmen Dongdajie; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) is located 300m east of the Lama Temple. Note that the penalty for overstaying your visa is ¥500 per day!

Mongolia

Most nationalities require a visa to enter Mongolia, with the following exceptions: US citizens, for stays up to 90 days; Israeli and Malaysian citizens, for up to 30 days; and Hong Kong and Singaporean citizens, for up to 14 days. To obtain a Mongolian visa, your passport must have at least six months' validity.

Standard tourist visas are valid for 30 days and cost US\$25. Processing the application usually takes three to five days. For longer than 30 days, you must obtain an invitation from a travel agency or 'sponsoring organisation'. If you are not leaving the train in Ulaanbaatar, or you are getting off only for a very short stay, you may obtain a transit visa in advance – good for 72 hours from the date of entry and costing US\$15.

For visa extensions, go to the **Ministry of External Relations** (cnr Peace Ave & Olympiin Gudamj; ☎ 9.30am-noon Mon-Fri). Enter from the back of the building. The extension is US\$15 for seven days and requires a passport photo. Some guesthouses will handle visa extensions for a small fee. Transit visas cannot be extended.

If you intend to stay in Mongolia for more than 30 days, you must register with the **Office of Immigration, Naturalization & Foreign Citizens** (INFC; ☎ 011-315 323; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), on the west side of Ulaanbaatar's Peace Bridge, opposite the NIC petrol station.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Bring sanitary towels or tampons only if there is a brand you absolutely must use. Otherwise you can find locally produced products.

You need to be wary; a woman alone should certainly avoid private taxis at night. Never get in any taxi with more than one person – the driver – already in it. In Russia, any young or youngish woman alone in or near flashy bars frequented by foreigners risks being mistaken for a prostitute.

You're unlikely to experience sexual harassment on the streets in most parts of Russia, though sexual stereotyping remains strong. In more remote areas, the idea that women are somehow less capable than men may persist. In rural areas, revealing clothing will probably attract unwanted attention (whereas on hot days in Moscow women wear as little as possible).

Russian women relish the chance to talk alone with a foreign woman, and the first thing they'll tell you is how hopeless their menfolk are. When journeying by train, women might consider buying a *platskart* (*platskartny*; open carriage) rather than a *kupe* (*kupeyny*; compartmentalised carriage) ticket, to avoid the risk of getting stuck in a closed compartment with three shady characters. If you do decide to travel *kupe* and don't like your cabin mates, tell the conductor who will more than likely find you a new place.

China is probably among the safest places in the world for foreign women to travel alone. Women are generally treated

respectfully, because principles of decorum are ingrained deeply in the culture.

Mongolia doesn't present too many problems for foreign women travelling independently. The majority of Mongolian men behave in a friendly and respectful manner, without ulterior motives. However, you may come across an annoying drunk or the occasional macho idiot. There are occasional incidents of solo female travellers reporting being harassed by their male guide. If your guide is male, it is best to keep in touch with your tour agency in Ulaanbaatar, perhaps making contingency plans with them if things go awry. Better yet, take a female guide whenever possible.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most travellers will start their Trans-Siberian or Trans-Mongolian trip in either Moscow or Beijing; this section of the chapter covers details for getting to or from either city. It's also possible to fly into or out of other major gateways, such as St Petersburg (p93), Vladivostok (p236) or Ulaanbaatar (p266). In addition, there are many options for overland approaches from Europe or Asia – mainly by rail but also by road – as well as arriving in or departing from the Far East by sea.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

There are no particular difficulties for travellers entering Russia, China or Mongolia. The main requirements are a valid pass-

port (valid for travel for six months after the expiry date of your visa) and a visa (see p315). Visas are not available at the borders.

AIR Airports & Airlines

Moscow's **Sheremetyevo-2** (airport code SVO; ☎ 095-956 4666; www.sheremetyevo-airport.ru) and the more modern **Domodedovo** (airport code DME; ☎ 095-933 6666; www.domodedovo.ru) airports host the bulk of Russia's international flights. There are also many daily international services to St Petersburg's **Pulkovo-2** (airport code LED; ☎ 812-704 3444; eng.pulkovo.ru).

You don't necessarily have to fly into either Moscow or St Petersburg – plenty of other cities along the Trans-Siberian route have direct international connections, including Kazan (p145), Khabarovsk (p229), Krasnoyarsk (p189), Irkutsk (p197), Nizhny Novgorod (p139), Novosibirsk (p177), Perm (p141), Vladivostok (p236) and Yekaterinburg (p155).

Beijing's **Capital Airport** (airport code PEK; ☎ 010-6459 9567 for international, 010-1689 6969 for domestic) is served by both international and domestic connections, as is Ulaanbaatar's **Buyant Ukhua Airport** (airport code PEK; ☎ 198, 011-983 005).

Airlines flying into all these airports include the following:

Aeroflot Russian International Airlines (airline code SU; ☎ 495-753 5555; www.aeroflot.com/eng; hub Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow)

Air China (airline code CA; ☎ 495-292 3387, 292 5440; www.china-airlines.com/en/index.htm; hub Beijing Capital Airport, Beijing)

Air France (airline code AF; ☎ 495-937 3839; www.airfrance.com; hub Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris)

Alitalia (airline code AZ; ☎ 495-258 3601; www.alitalia.it; hub Malpensa Airport, Milan)

American Airlines (airline code AA; www.aa.com; hub Fort Worth, Texas)

Austrian Airlines (airline code OS; ☎ 495-995 0995; www.aa.com; hub Vienna International Airport, Vienna)

Bashkir Airlines (BAL; airline code V9; ☎ 3472-733 656 in Ufa; www.bal.ufanet.ru, in Russian; hub Ufa)

British Airways (airline code BA; ☎ 495-363 2525; www.britishairways.com; hub London Heathrow, London)

CSA (Czech Airlines; airline code OK; ☎ 495-973 1847, 978 1745; www.csa.cz/en/; hub Prague)

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Delta Air Lines (airline code DL; ☎ 495-937 9090; www.delta.com; hub Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport, Atlanta)

Dragonair (airline code KA; www.dragonair.com; hub Hong Kong)

El Al Israel Airlines (airline code LY; ☎ 495-232 1017; www.elal.co.il; hub Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv)

Finnair (airline code AY; ☎ 495-933 0056; www.finnair.com; hub Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, Helsinki)

Japan Airlines (airline code JL; ☎ 495-921 6448, 921 6648; www.jal.co.jp/en; hub Narita Airport, Tokyo)

KLM (airline code KL; ☎ 495-258 3600; www.klm.com; hub Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam)

Kogalymavia (airline code 7K; www.kolavia.narod.ru/index.htm)

Korean Air (airline code KE; ☎ 495-725 2727; www.koreanair.com; hub Incheon International Airport, Seoul)

Krasair (airline code 7B; ☎ 3912-555 999 in Krasnoyarsk; www.krasair.ru in Russian; hub Krasnoyarsk)

LOT Polish Airlines (airline code LO; ☎ 495-229 5771; www.lot.com; hub Fredrick Chopin Airport, Warsaw)

Lufthansa (airline code LH; ☎ 495-737 6400; www.luft.hansa.com; hub Frankfurt International Airport, Frankfurt)

Magadan Airlines (airline code H5; ☎ 41322-97610 in Magadan; http://mavial.magtrk.ru in Russian; hub Magadan)

MIAT Mongolian Airlines (airline code OM; ☎ 495-241 0754 in Moscow, 976-11-379935 in Ulaanbaatar; www.miat.com; hub Ulaanbaatar)

Pulkovo (airline code FV; ☎ 495-925 4747; http://eng.pulkovo.ru; hub Pulkovo International Airport, St Petersburg)

Qantas (airline code QF; www.qantas.com.au; hub Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney)

SAS (airline code SK; ☎ 495-925 4747; www.scandinavian.net; hub Copenhagen Airport, Copenhagen)

Siberia Airlines (airline code S7; ☎ 495-777 9999 in Moscow, ☎ 383-359 9090 in Novosibirsk; www.s7.ru; hub Novosibirsk)

Singapore Airlines (airline code SQ; www.singaporeair.com; hub Changi Airport, Singapore)

Swissair (airline code LX; ☎ 495-937 7799; www.swissair.com; hub Zurich Airport, Zurich)

Transaero Airlines (airline code UN; ☎ 495-241 4800, 241 7676; www.transaero.com/noframes/eng/home.htm; hub Sheremetyevo-2 Airport, Moscow)

Turkish Airlines (airline code TK; ☎ 495-292 1667; www.turkishairlines.com; hub Istanbul Ataturk International Airport, Istanbul)

Ural Airlines (airline code U6; ☎ 343-264 3600 in Yekaterinburg; www.uralairlines.ru; hub Yekaterinburg)

Vladivostok Air (airline code XF; ☎ 4232-426 296 in Vladivostok; www.vladavia.ru; hub Vladivostok)

Tickets

Good deals on tickets can be found both online and through discount agencies. Use the fares quoted in this book as a guide only. They are approximate and based on the rates advertised by travel agencies and online at the time of research. Quoted airfares do not necessarily constitute a recommendation for the carrier.

There are many websites specifically aimed at selling flights; sometimes these fares are cheap, often they're no cheaper than those sold at a standard travel agency, and occasionally they're way too expensive – but it's certainly a convenient way of researching flights from the comfort of your own home or office. Many large travel agencies also have websites, but not all of them allow you to look up fares and schedules. See p325 for a list of agencies that specialise in tours along the Trans-Siberian routes; some of these will offer discount fares, too.

Websites worth checking include the following:

www.cheapflights.co.uk Really does post some of the cheapest flights (out of the UK only), but book early to get the bargains.

www.dialaflight.com Offers worldwide flights out of Europe and the UK.

www.expedia.com A good site for checking worldwide flight prices.

www.lastminute.com This site deals mainly in European flights, but does have worldwide flights, mostly package returns. There's also a link to an Australian version.

www.statravel.com STA Travel's US website. There are also UK (www.statravel.co.uk) and Australian (www.statravel.com.au) sites.

www.travel.com.au A good site for Australians to find cheap flights. A New Zealand site (www.travel.co.nz) also exists.

To bid for last-minute tickets online try **Sky-auction** (www.skyauction.com). **Priceline** (www.priceline.com) aims to match the ticket price to your budget. Another cheap option is air courier tickets but they do carry restrictions; for more information check out organisations such as **Courier Association** (☎ 1800-461 9497; www.aircourier.org) or the **International Association of Air Travel Couriers** (IAATC; www.courier.org).

Australia

Two well-known agencies for cheap fares, with offices throughout Australia, are **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) and **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au).

The cheapest flight you're going to get would be something like Sydney to Seoul and then Seoul to Moscow; a Korean Air

TIME ZONES ALONG THE ROUTE



RUSSIA THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

There are plenty of options to reach Moscow or St Petersburg using budget flights out of European cities. Germany is particularly well served with **Germania Express** (airline code ST; ☎ 49-01805-737 100 in Germany; www.gexx.de; hubs Berlin, Düsseldorf and Munich) connecting Berlin, Düsseldorf and Munich with Moscow's Domodedovo, and **German Wings** (airline code 4U; ☎ 49-01805-955 855 in Germany; www.27.germanwings.com; hubs Hamburg, Cologne/Bonn, Stuttgart and Dresden) flying Berlin, Bonn and Cologne to Moscow's Vnukovo airport. SAS's budget airline **Snowflake** (www.flysnowflake.com; ☎ 46-8-797 4000 in Stockholm; hubs Stockholm and Copenhagen) has services from Copenhagen and Stockholm to both Moscow's Sheremetyevo-2 and St Petersburg. From the Baltic countries, you can fly Tallinn to Sheremetyevo on **Estonian Air** (airline code OV; ☎ 372-640 1160 in Tallinn; www.estonian-air.ee; hub Tallinn) and Riga to Moscow and St Petersburg with **Air Baltic** (airline code BT; ☎ 371-720 7473 in Riga; www.airbaltic.com; hub Riga).

Finland is also a popular back-door way into Russia with both Helsinki and Tampere being connected by various budget airlines to other parts of Europe. From either city you can take a bus or trains to St Petersburg. Also check out www.waytorussia.net/transport/international/budget.html for some ideas of how to get cheaply to Moscow or St Petersburg from London or Germany via the Baltic countries. One more option is to get yourself through Poland to Kaliningrad and then take an internal Russian flight from there.

There are also (particularly during the summer season) charter flights to and from Russia, mainly to resort towns in Turkey, Greece, Egypt and other countries. These flights, which never show up on regular schedules, may be cheap, but sometimes the planes being used leave a lot to be desired in terms of comfort and, more worryingly, safety. Buyer beware!

deal starts at return A\$1400. Seoul is also the most convenient transfer point for flights on to Vladivostok or Khabarovsk.

To Beijing the low-season return fares from Sydney start at around A\$1000.

Canada

Canadian discount agencies, also known as consolidators, advertise their flight specials in major newspapers such as the *Toronto Star* and the *Vancouver Sun*. The national student travel agency is **Travel CUTS** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com).

In general, fares from Canada to Russia or China cost 10% more than from the USA. From Vancouver to Moscow return low-season fares start from C\$1145; from Montreal C\$1400. From Vancouver to Beijing you'll pay from around C\$1200, from Montreal around C\$1460.

China

There are daily flights offered by China Airlines and Aeroflot Russian International Airlines to Moscow from Beijing (return Y\$700). There are five flights a week between Shanghai and Moscow (return Y\$700). There are also flights from Beijing to Novosibirsk (one-way US\$505); Guangzhou to Khabarovsk (one-way US\$320); Harbin to Khabarovsk (one-way US\$170) and Vladivostok (one-way R\$900); Shenyang to Irkutsk (one-way from US\$170); and Ürümqi to Novosibirsk (one-way US\$184). Tianjin and Dalian also have infrequent connections with Vladivostok.

Transaero Airlines flies occasionally from Moscow to Hong Kong. Three carriers fly the Beijing–Hong Kong route: China Airlines, China Southern and Dragonair. Fixed return tickets between Beijing and Hong Kong start at HK\$1600.

Continental Europe

Generally there is not much variation in airfare prices from the main European cities. All the major airlines, as well as travel agencies, are usually offering some sort of deal, so shop around.

Return fares to Moscow from major Western European cities start at around €250, to Beijing €870.

FRANCE

French travel agencies with branches around the country specialising in youth and stu-

dent fares include **OTU Voyages** (www.otu.fr) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr). Also try **Anyway** (☎ 0892 893 892; www.anyway.fr) and **Lastminute** (☎ 0892 705 000; www.fr.lastminute.com).

GERMANY

Germany is an excellent jumping-off point for Russia, with not only plenty of connections to a range of Russian cities with Lufthansa, but also connections through budget airlines such as Germania Express and German Wings (see p321). The following airlines also fly direct between Germany and the Caucasus: **Kuban Air** (www.alk.ru/eng/alk), **Don Aeroflot** (www.aeroflot-don.ru) and **KMV Avia** (www.kmavia.ru/engl). Krasair and Siberia Airlines all have direct connections to Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk respectively.

Recommended agencies in Germany include **Just Travel** (☎ 089-747 3330; www.justtravel.de), **STA Travel** (☎ 01805-456 422; www.statravel.de) and **Travel Overland** (☎ 01805-276 370; www.travel-overland.de). **J&S ONG** (☎ 02361-904 7981; jsohg@gmx.de; Hemerstr 26, 45657 Recklinghausen) is useful for booking tickets on regional Russian airlines.

ITALY

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it) specialises in student and youth travel fares.

NETHERLANDS

A recommended agency is **Airfair** (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl).

SPAIN

Try **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 116 226; www.barcelo.viajes.com).

Japan

Reliable discount agencies in Japan include **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3200 8871; www.no1-travel.com) and **Across Travellers Bureau** (☎ 03-3373 9040; www.across-travel.com) as well as **STA Travel** (☎ 03-5485 8380; www.statravel.co.jp), which has branches in both Tokyo and Osaka.

Return flights from Tokyo to Moscow are around ¥220,000, although at certain times of the year 60-day excursion fares on Aeroflot can go as low as ¥60,000. Air China and Japan Airlines have several flights per week from Tokyo and Osaka to Beijing. Return fares start from ¥30,000.

Other useful connections are from Vladivostok to Niigata (one-way/return from

¥41,000/48,000), Osaka (¥46,000/42,000) and Toyama (¥47,000/58,000). In August there are also weekly direct flights between Tokyo and Vladivostok (R6900). From Khabarovsk there are weekly flights to Niigata, and from July to September, a service to Aomori (both one-way/return ¥42,000/60,000).

Mongolia & Central Asia

Ulaanbaatar is connected by plane with Moscow (one-way/return from US\$330/580) and Irkutsk (one-way/return US\$210/400), though the latter can be discounted to under one-way/return US\$70/140 in winter.

There are dozens of connections to Central Asia. From Moscow there are many direct flights. Also from Novosibirsk you can reach Almaty (US\$160) in Kazakhstan; Andizhan (US\$125) and Tashkent (US\$135) in Uzbekistan; Dushanbe (US\$145) and Khujand/Khodzhent (US\$140) in Tajikistan; and Bishkek (US\$170) in Kyrgyzstan. Tyumen, Omsk and Krasnoyarsk have a slightly smaller range of similar destinations.

New Zealand

The *New Zealand Herald* has a travel section in which travel agencies advertise fares. **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches in Auckland and elsewhere in the country; check the websites for complete listings.

Airfares from New Zealand to Russia are similar to those from Australia; for details see p321.

Singapore

In Singapore, **STA Travel** (☎ 737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg; 33A Cuppage Rd, Cuppage Tce) offers competitive discount fares for Asian destinations and beyond. Singapore, like Bangkok, has hundreds of travel agents, so you can compare prices on flights.

South Korea

Seoul in South Korea is a possible international travel hub for Siberia and the Russian Far East, with weekly flights to Khabarovsk (from US\$300 one-way) and Novosibirsk (one-way/return US\$490/670) and services to Vladivostok (R11,000) at least twice per week. There are also flights connecting Pusan to/from Vladivostok.

Thailand

Although most Asian countries are now offering fairly competitive deals, Bangkok is still one of the best places to shop around for discount tickets. Khao San Rd in Bangkok is the budget travellers' headquarters. Bangkok has a number of excellent travel agencies but there are also some suspect ones; ask the advice of other travellers before handing over your cash. **STA Travel** (☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; room 1406, 14th fl, Wall St Tower, 33/70 Surawong Rd) is a reliable place to start. Aeroflot has direct flights to Moscow from Bangkok. Siberia Airlines flies to Novosibirsk (US\$303) and several other Russian airlines offer seasonal charters.

UK & Ireland

Newspapers and magazines such as *Time Out* and *TNT Magazine* in London regularly advertise low fares to Moscow. Start your research with the major student or backpacker-oriented travel agencies such as STA and Trailfinders. Through these reliable agents you can get an idea of what's available and how much you're going to pay – although a bit of ringing around to the smaller agencies afterwards will often turn up cheaper fares.

Reputable agencies in London include the following:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870-814 4400; www.b-t-w.co.uk)
Flightbookers (☎ 0870-010 7000; www.ebookers.co.uk)
Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)
STA Travel (☎ 0870-160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk)
Traifinders (☎ 020-7938 3939; www.traifinders.co.uk)

Shop around and you might get a low-season one-way/return fare to Moscow for UK£150/200. Flights to St Petersburg are a bit more expensive at around UK£200/250. Aeroflot generally offers the cheapest deals. Return fares from London to Beijing start at UK£470.

USA

Discount travel agencies in the USA are called consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'), and they can be found in the travel sections of major daily newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, as well as in alternative weeklies. Good deals can generally be found at agencies in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and other gateway cities.

Try **STA Travel** (☎ 1-800 781 4040; www.statravel.com), which has a wide network of offices. A specialist agency is **Interactive Russia** (☎ 866-680-1373; travel.in-russia.com).

Economy-class airfares from New York to Moscow or Beijing can go as low as return US\$700. From Los Angeles you're looking at return fares to Moscow of around US\$880, to Beijing of US\$600.

LAND

Both Russia and China each share borders with 14 countries, so if you're planning on travelling overland to join or leave the Trans-Siberian routes there is no shortage of options.

More often than not it will be by train that you cross into or leave this region, but there are also several useful bus services; we list some here. You should also check well in advance whether or not you will need a visa for any of the countries you will be passing through en route to Russia or China.

If you are really up for an epic train journey – 17,852km across 12 countries – the Trans-Mongolian route is the lynchpin of the longest possible trip entirely by rail from Vila Real de Santo Antonio in Portugal to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in Vietnam.

Border Crossings

See p256 for details of the border crossing between Russia and Mongolia, p256 for between Mongolia and China, and p272 for the Russia/China crossing. For overland routes into China, see Lonely Planet's *China* guidebook for full details.

Belarus

Belarus' capital Minsk is well connected by train with Moscow (BR66,000 to BR104,000, 11 hours, 20 daily); there's also a daily service to St Petersburg (BR113,000, 16 hours). There are two weekly buses to Moscow (BR34,000, 14½ hours) and a weekly service to St Petersburg (BR50,000, 19 hours).

Estonia

The nearest border crossing from Tallinn is at Narva. There's a daily train between Moscow and Tallinn (R1560, 16 hours) and seven express buses daily from St Petersburg (R550 to R650, 7½ hours).

Finland

There are two daily trains between St Petersburg and Helsinki; see p95 for details. There's also the daily 31/34 'Leo Tolstoy' service between Moscow and Helsinki (13½ hours). There are many daily buses between Helsinki and St Petersburg. For more details, see p93.

Kazakhstan

Trains to/from Kazakhstan run every two days between Moscow and Almaty (R4100, 78 hours). There is also a service between Novosibirsk–Almaty, and some of the services between Yekaterinburg and Omsk also cut through Kazakhstan, stopping at the city of Petropavlovsk.

Latvia

Handy overnight trains run daily between Riga and Moscow (R1404 *platskart*, 15 hours) and St Petersburg (R1812, 13 hours). There are two daily buses from Riga to St Petersburg (R500, 11 hours); see p93. There are also two to three buses daily to Moscow (14 to 16 hours). See <http://ecolines.lv> for more bus information.

Lithuania

From Vilnius trains leave for Moscow (R1588, 15 hours) three times a week and for St Petersburg (R1387 to R1499, 15¼ hours) every other day. The St Petersburg trains cross Latvia, and the Moscow ones cross Belarus; you'll need a transit visa.

Mongolia

Apart from the Trans-Mongolian train connecting Moscow and Beijing, there's a direct train twice a week from Ulaanbaatar to Moscow (R3800, 101 hours) as well as a daily service to and from Irkutsk (R1600, 25 to 35 hours). There's also a bus service connecting Ulan-Ude and Ulaanbaatar (p217).

Poland

There are daily services linking Warsaw with Moscow (R2200, 20 hours) and St Petersburg (R2240, 29 hours). The Moscow trains enter Belarus near Brest. The St Petersburg trains leave Poland at Kuznica, which is near Hrodna (Grodno in Russian) in Belarus. Changing the wheels to/from Russia's wider gauge adds three hours to the journey.

UK & Europe

Travelling overland by train from the UK or Western Europe takes a minimum of two days and nights. It is, however, a great way of easing yourself into the rhythm of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

There are no direct trains from the UK to Russia. The most straightforward route is on the **Eurostar** (www.eurostar.com) to Brussels, and then a two-night direct train to Moscow via Warsaw and Minsk (Belarus). The total cost can be as low as £217 one-way. See www.seat61.com/russia.htm#moscow for details of this and other train services to Moscow.

To avoid the hassle of getting a Belarus transit visa consider taking the train to St Petersburg from Vilnius (opposite), which runs several times a week via Latvia. There are daily connections between Vilnius and Warsaw.

From Moscow and St Petersburg there are also regular international services to European cities including Berlin, Budapest, Prague, Vienna and Warsaw; see p120 and p94 for details.

For European rail timetables check www.railfaneurope.net, which provides a central link to all of Europe's national railways.

Ukraine

Most major Ukrainian cities have daily services to Moscow, with two border crossings: one used by trains heading to Kyiv (Kiev), the other by trains passing through Kharkiv.

Between Kyiv and Moscow (R1033, nine hours, nine services daily) the best trains to take (numbers are southbound/northbound) are the *Metropolitan Express*, the 1/2 (the *Ukrainia*) or 3/4 (the *Kyiv*). The best train between Moscow and Lviv (Lvov in Russian; 28 hours, daily via Kyiv) is 73/74. Between Moscow and Odesa (28 hours, daily via Kyiv) there's the *Odesa* (23/24). There are also daily trains to/from St Petersburg to Lviv (31 hours via Vilnius) and Kyiv (26 hours).

From Kharkiv to Moscow (13 hours, about 14 daily via Kursk) the best service is the *Kharkiv* (19/20). Other services connecting with Moscow include Simferopol (26 hours, daily via Kharkiv), Donetsk (22 hours, three daily), Dnipropetrovsk (20 hours, twice daily), Zaporizhzhya (Zaporozhye in Russian; 19 hours, twice daily) and Sevastopol (29½ hours, daily).

There are also daily international trains passing through Ukraine to/from Moscow's Kyivsky vokzal. These include the 15/16 Kyiv–Lviv–Chop–Budapest–Belgrade, with a carriage to Zagreb three times a week.

RIVER & SEA

The Amur River, which forms part of the border between Russia and China, can be crossed by ferries from Khabarovsk to Fuyuan (p229) and from Blagoveshchensk to Heihe (p223).

Russia

St Petersburg is regularly connected by **Silja Line** (www.silja.fi) cruises with Helsinki in Finland (from €120, 15 hours) and less frequently by ferry with Tallinn in Estonia (€20, 14½ hours) and Rostock in Germany (€90, 42 hours). **Baltfinn** (www.baltfinn.ru) offers weekly ferry service on the ship *George Ots*, travelling between Baltisk (the port near the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad) and St Petersburg. **Baltic Line** (www.baltics.ru/bl/eng/) and **Trans Russia Express** (www.tre.de) both run weekly ferries to Lubeck in Germany which also go via Baltisk; check their websites for current details. For details of ferries from Vladivostok to Japan and South Korea, see p236.

China

Beijing's nearest seaport is Tianjin Municipality's port district of Tanggu. Ships travel between Tianjin and Kobe, Japan, once a week (from Y1875, 48 hours) and Incheon, South Korea, twice a week (from Y1000, 28 hours). In China buy tickets at the Tanggu **passenger ferry terminal** (☎ 022-2570 6728) or Tianjin's **CITS** (☎ 022-2835 8309; 22 Youyi Lu, Tianjin; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri).

TOURS

If you have time, and a certain degree of determination, organising your own trip to Russia is easily done; see p14. But for many travellers, opting for the assistance of an agency in drawing up an itinerary, booking train tickets and accommodation, not to mention helping with the visa paperwork, will be preferable.

The following agencies and tour companies provide a range of travel services. Numerous more locally based agencies can provide tours once you're in Russia; see the destination chapters for details. Many work

in conjunction with overseas agencies so if you go to them directly you'll usually pay less.

Australia

Eastern Europe/Russian Travel Centre (☎ 02-9262 1144; www.eetbtravel.com; Level 5, 75 King St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Passport Travel (☎ 03-9867 3888; www.travelcentre.com.au; Suite 11A, 401 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, Vic 3004)

Russian Gateway Tours (☎ 02-9745 3333; www.russian-gateway.com.au; 48 The Boulevard, Strathfield, NSW 2135)

Sundowners (☎ 03-9672 5300; www.sundownerstravel.com; Suite 15, 600 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, Vic 3000) Specialises in Trans-Siberian packages and tours.

Travel Directors (☎ 08-9242 4200; www.travel-directors.com.au; 177 Oxford St, Leederville, WA 6007) Upmarket Trans-Siberian tour operator.

Canada

Trek Escapes (☎ 866-338-TREK; www.trekescapes.com/index.cfm; 223 Carlton St, Toronto, Ontario M5A 2L2) Canada's top adventure tour agency offers Trans-Siberian packages with Sundowners and Imaginative Traveller. Also has branches in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

China

Beijing Tourism Group (BTG; ☎ 010-6515 8562; Beijing Tourist Bldg, 28 Jianguomen Wai Dajie, Beijing) Formerly known as the China International Travel Service (CITS).

Monkey Business (☎ 010-6591 6519; www.monkeyshrine.com; room 35, Red House Hotel, 10 Chu Xiu Lu, Dongzhimenwai, Beijing) Offers tours on the Trans-Siberian, Trans-Manchurian and Trans-Mongolian trains.

Moonsky Star Ltd (☎ 852-2723 1376; Chung King Mansion, E-4-6, Nathan Rd 36-44, Kowloon, Hong Kong) Monkey Business' Hong Kong partner.

Germany

Lernidee Reisen (☎ 030-786 0000; www.lernidee-reisen.de; Eisenacher Strasse, D-10777 Berlin)

Japan

M0 Tourist CIS Russian Centre (☎ 03-5296 5783; www.m0tcis.com, in Japanese; 2F Kandatsukasa-cho Bldg, 2-2-12 Kandatsukasa-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101 0048) Can help arrange ferries and flights to Russia.

UK

GW Travel Ltd (☎ 0161-928 9410; www.gwtravel.co.uk; Denzell House, Denzell Gardens, Dunham Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QF) Offers luxury Trans-Siberian tours on private Pullman-style carriages with restaurants, showers and lectures.

Imaginative Traveller (☎ 0800-316 2717; www.imaginative-traveller.com; 1 Betts Ave, Martlesham Heath, Suffolk IP5 7RH)

Intourist Travel (☎ 020-7538 8600; www.intourist.co.uk; 219 Marsh Wall, London E14 9PD)

Regent Holidays (☎ 0117-921 1711; www.regent-holidays.co.uk; 15 John St, Bristol BS1 2HR)

Russia Experience (☎ 020-8566 8846; www.trans-siberian.co.uk; Research House, Fraser Rd, Perivale, Middlesex UB6 7AQ) Also runs the Beetroot Bus (www.beetroot.org), a backpacker-style tour between St Petersburg and Moscow, as well as adventurous programmes in the Altai and Tuva.

Russian Gateway (☎ 08704-46 1690; www.russian-gateway.co.uk) Web-based agency.

Steppes East (☎ 01285-880 980; www.steppeseast.co.uk; The Travel House, 51 Castle St, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1QD) Specialises in catering to off-beat requirements.

Travel for the Arts (☎ 020-8799 8350; www.travelforthearts.co.uk; 12-15 Hangar Green, London W5 3EL) Specialist in luxury culture-based tours to Russia for people with a specific interest in opera and ballet.

Voyages Jules Verne (☎ 020-7616 1000; www.vjv.co.uk; 21 Dorset Sq, London NW1 6QG) Offers a variety of upmarket tours in Russia.

USA

Cruise Marketing International (☎ 800-578-7742; www.cruiserrussia.com; Suite 3, 3401 Investment Rd, Hayward, CA 94545) Books tours on cruises along Russian waterways such as the Volga River.

Far East Development (☎ 206-282-0824; www.traveleastrussia.com; 1321 W Emerson 6, Seattle, WA 98119) Eco-adventure tour company specialising in Far East Russia.

Mir Corporation (☎ 206-624-7289; www.mircorp.com; Suite 210, 85 S Washington St, Seattle, WA 98104) Options include private train tours along the Trans-Siberian route in Pullman-style carriages.

Red Star Travel (☎ 206-522-5995; www.travel2russia.com; Suite 102, 123 Queen Anne Ave N, Seattle, WA 98109)

Russiatours (☎ 800-633-1008; www.russia-tours.com; Suite 102, 13312 N 56th St, Tampa, FL 33617) Specialises in luxury tours to Moscow and St Petersburg.

Sokol Tours (☎ /fax 724-935-5373; www.sokoltours.com; 27 Meeting House Lane, Bradford Woods, PA 15015-1310) Tour options include train trips, Tuva and Kamchatka.

White Nights (☎ /fax 916-979-9381; www.wnights.com; 610 La Sierra Dr, Sacramento, CA 95864) This company also has offices in Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and Switzerland.

GETTING AROUND

For most, if not all, of your Trans-Siberian journey you're going to be getting around on the train, but sometimes you might need to take an internal flight or a bus. The following details apply mainly for getting around Russia, with significant differences mentioned for China and Mongolia. There's also some information for those thinking of driving or cycling through Russia (see p329).

AIR Russia

It's no problem buying a ticket, with *avia kassy* (ticket offices) all over most large towns and cities. Generally speaking, you'll do better booking internal flights once you arrive in Russia. Fares are generally 30% cheaper (60% on major Moscow routings) for advance bookings or evening departures. Finding out fares before you arrive can be tricky; try the airline websites listed on p319, or contact **Primorskoye Aeroagentsvo** (☎ 4232-407 707; www.airagency.ru), a Vladivostok-based agency with branches in Moscow and St Petersburg as well as across the Russian Far East, which will quote fares and have English-speaking agents.

Tickets can also be purchased at the airport right up to the departure of the flight and sometimes even if the city centre office says that the plane is full. Return fares are usually double the cost of one-way fares.

Make sure you reconfirm your flight at least 24 hours before takeoff: Russian airlines have a nasty habit of cancelling unconfirmed tickets. Airlines may also bump you if you don't check in at least 90 minutes before departure. Unlike the train, the idea of schedules being stuck to remains in the realms of fantasy: delays and cancellations are common.

The mechanical safety of the planes is an issue, as are the safety procedures (or lack of) for protecting against terrorist attacks. Generally, **Aeroflot Russian Airlines** (www.aeroflot.com), **Transaero** (www.transaero.ru/english) and **Kras-air** (www.krasair.ru) are the airlines with a consistent safety record.

To minimise the danger of loss or theft, try not to check in any baggage: many planes have special stowage areas for large carry-on pieces. Russian airlines can be very strict

about charging for bags that are overweight, which generally means anything over 20kg.

China

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng) is the civil aviation authority for numerous airlines, including **Air China** (www.airchina.com.cn), **China Eastern Airlines** (www.ce-air.com) and **China Southern Airlines** (www.cs-air.com).

CAAC publishes timetables in both English and Chinese in April and November each year, available at airports and CAAC offices in China. Tickets are easy to purchase from branches of CAAC nationwide, other airline offices and travel agents or from the travel desk of your hotel; at most times there is an oversupply of airline seats (except during major festivals and holidays). Ask around for discounts. Return tickets cost twice the single fare.

On domestic and international flights the free baggage allowance for an adult passenger is 20kg in economy class and 30kg in 1st class. You are also allowed 5kg of hand luggage, though this is rarely weighed.

Mongolia

Although Mongolia has 81 airports and airstrips, only 31 can be used permanently and only eight of these are paved. Almost all of the destinations are served directly from Ulaanbaatar. The domestic fleet of **Mongolian Airlines** (www.miat.com) has been retired due to age and the cash-strapped government has been reluctant to buy or lease new planes, knowing full well that the domestic market is virtually unprofitable. Possible alternatives are **Aero Mongolia** (☎ 011-330 373; www.aeromongolia.mn) and **Blue Sky Aviation** (☎ 011-312 085; www.bsamongolia.com), which has a nine-seat Cessna that can be chartered for any part of the country.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE Russia

Russian main roads are a really mixed bag – sometimes they are smooth, straight dual carriageways, sometimes rough, narrow, winding and choked with the diesel fumes of the slow, heavy vehicles that make up a high proportion of Russian traffic. Driving much more than 300km in the course of a day is pretty tiring.

Russian drivers use indicators far less than they should, and like to overtake everything

on the road – on the inside. Priority rules at roundabouts seem to vary from area to area: all you can do is follow local practice. Russian drivers rarely switch on anything more than sidelights – and often not even those – until it's pitch black at night. Some say this is to avoid dazzling others, as for some reason dipping headlights is not a common practice.

FUEL

Western-style gas stations are common. Petrol comes in four main grades: 76, 93, 95 and 98 octane. And prices are cheap by European standards: R8 a litre for 76 octane and R10 a litre for 98 octane. Unleaded gas is available in major cities; BP gas stations usually always sell it. *Dizel* (diesel) is also available (around R13 a litre). In the countryside, petrol stations are usually not more than 100km apart, but you shouldn't rely on this.

ROAD RULES

Russians drive on the right-hand side of the road and traffic coming from the right has the right of way. Speed limits are generally 60km/h in towns and between 80km/h and 110km/h on highways. There may be a 90km/h zone, enforced by speed traps,

THE GAI

Not to put too fine a point on it, many officers of the State Automobile Inspectorate, GAI (*gah-ye*, short for Gosudarstvennaya Avtomobilnaya Inspektsia), are nothing short of highway bandits. GAI officers are authorised to stop you (they do this by pointing their striped, sometimes lighted, stick at you and waving you towards the side of the road), issue on-the-spot fines and shoot at you if you don't pull over.

Watch for speed traps on major roads into Moscow and St Petersburg. There are permanent GAI checkpoints at the boundary of many Russian cities and towns, while in cities, the GAI is everywhere, stopping cars for no reason and collecting 'fines'. For serious infractions, the GAI can confiscate your licence, which you'll have to retrieve from the main station. Get receipts for any fine you pay and if you think you've been ripped off, head for the nearest GAI office and complain. Get the shield number of the arresting officer.

as you leave a city. Children under 12 may not travel in the front seat, and safety-belt use is mandatory. Motorcycle riders (and passengers) must wear crash helmets.

Technically the maximum legal blood-alcohol content is 0.04%, but in practice it is illegal to drive after consuming *any* alcohol at all. This is a rule that is strictly enforced. The normal way of establishing alcohol in the blood is by a blood test, but apparently you can be deemed under the influence even without any test.

Traffic lights that flicker green are about to change to yellow, then red.

You'll need to be 18 years old and have an International Driving Permit with a Russian translation of your licence, or a certified Russian translation of your full licence (you can certify translations at a Russian embassy or consulate).

Don't forget your vehicle's registration papers, proof of insurance (be sure it covers you in Russia) and a customs declaration promising that you will take your vehicle with you when you leave. To get the exact details on all this it's best to contact your automobile association (eg the AA or RAC in the UK) at least three months before your trip.

China

The authorities remain anxious about foreigners driving at whim around China, so don't plan on hiring a car and driving wherever you want. Cars can be hired in Beijing for local use only. Road conditions in China should abolish any remaining desire to get behind the wheel. Bilingual road signs are making a slow appearance along some highways, but much remains to confuse would-be drivers from abroad.

DRIVING LICENCE

To hire a car, you will need to come armed with an International Driving Permit. Foreigners can drive motorcycles if they are residents in China and have a Chinese motorcycle licence.

HIRE

Although tourists are permitted to rent vehicles in Beijing and a handful of other major cities it's not worth the hassle and inconvenience. You will be restricted to driving around within the perimeters of each city. Although expat residents report little

TRANS-SIBERIAN DRIVING & CYCLING

In 2004 the final missing link in a Trans-Russian highway was filled when a section of road opened between Chita and Khabarovsk. It's now possible to drive or cycle the 10,000-plus kilometres from St Petersburg to Vladivostok, although only about one-quarter of the eastern section of the highway is paved. The rest is gravel-topped, but there are plans to have the entire highway paved in the coming years.

A few intrepid souls have been known to rise to the challenge of driving, even cycling, across the country. Recently Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman wrote about their Russian adventures in *Long Way Round* (www.longwayround.com/lwr.htm); their round-the-world route took them from Volgograd all the way to Yakutsk and Magadan via Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The celebrity bikers had a camera crew and support team following them. For tales of how to cross part of Russia the hard way check out www.roundtheworldbybike.com, the website of Alistair Humphreys who cycled from Magadan to Vanino in the depths of winter!

Before following in these footsteps, bear in mind the often numbing monotony of the landscape, the sometimes dire quality of the roads, the lack of adequate signposting, the keen-eyed highway police on the lookout for a bribe, and the difficulty of obtaining spare parts. Should you still feel inspired, the crucial information is outlined on p327.

problem driving into provinces neighbouring the above locations, we cannot advise attempting to drive beyond these few cities as hire cars carry easily identifiable licence plates. Rates for hire cars start at around Y300 per day, with monthly rates from around Y5000; on most occasions, using taxis all day will work out much cheaper.

If you want to use a car, it's easy enough to book a car with a driver. Basically, this is just a standard long-distance taxi. Travel agencies like CITS or even hotel booking desks can make the arrangements. They generally ask excessive fees – the name of the game is to negotiate. If you can communicate in Chinese or find someone to translate, it's not particularly difficult to find a private taxi driver to take you wherever you like for less than half the CITS rates.

Mongolia

Travelling around Mongolia with your own car or motorcycle – without a driver – is not recommended. What look like main roads on the map are often little more than tyre tracks in the dirt, sand or mud. All maps are inadequate, and there is hardly a signpost in the whole country. In Mongolia, roads connect nomads, most of whom by their nature keep moving so even the roads are seminomadic, shifting like restless rivers. Remote tracks quickly turn into eight-lane dirt highways devoid of any traffic making navigation tricky – some drivers follow the telephone lines when there are any, or else

ask for directions at *gers* (felt tents) along the way. Towns with food and water are few and far between, and very few people in the countryside will speak anything but Mongolian or, if you are lucky, Russian.

If all this hasn't put you off, keep in mind that foreigners have been jailed for being involved in traffic accidents, even if they were not at fault. We've heard horror stories of Mongolians purposely causing accidents with foreigners simply to make them pay for damages (police tend to side with the home team). Contact your embassy immediately if you get in trouble. Another way to avoid jail is to claim an injury, in which case you'll be taken to a hospital.

HIRE

There is nowhere official in Mongolia to rent a car or motorcycle. If you want to buy one, you will have to ask around, or check out the 'car market' (*Tsaiz zakh*) in the northeastern part of Ulaanbaatar.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and Lonely Planet doesn't recommend it. Travellers who hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk.

Russia

Hitching in Russia is a very common method of getting around. In cities, hitching rides is called hailing a taxi, no matter what type

of vehicle stops (see opposite for more information). In the countryside, especially in remote areas not well served by public transport, hitching is a major mode of transport.

China

Passengers are expected to offer at least a tip when hitching in China. Some drivers might even ask for an unreasonable amount of money, so try to establish a figure early to avoid problems later. Even when a price is agreed upon, don't be surprised if the driver raises it when you arrive at your destination and creates a big scene (with a big crowd) if you don't cough up the extra cash. Indeed, they may even pull this scam halfway through the trip, and if you don't pay up you get kicked out in the middle of nowhere.

In other words, don't think of hitching as a means to save money – it will rarely be any cheaper than the bus. The main reason to do it is to get to isolated outposts where public transport is poor. There is, of course, some joy in meeting the locals this way, but communicating is certain to be a problem if you don't speak Chinese.

Mongolia

Because the country is so vast, public transport so limited and the people so poor, hitching (usually on trucks) is a recognised – and, often, the only – form of transport in the countryside. Hitching is seldom free and often no different from just waiting for public transport to turn up. It is *always* slow – after stopping at *gers* to drink, fixing flat tyres, breaking down, running out of petrol and getting stuck in mud and rivers, a truck can take 48 hours to cover 200km.

Hitching is not generally dangerous personally, but it is still hazardous and often extremely uncomfortable. Don't expect much traffic in remote rural areas; you might see one or two vehicles a day on many roads, and sometimes nobody at all for several days. The best place to wait is the petrol station on the outskirts of town, where most vehicles stop before any journey.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

For details of local trains see opposite. Also see the Getting Around sections of the city and route guide chapters for details of local bus, metro, tram and boat services.

Boat RUSSIA

In summer it's possible to travel long distances across Russia on passenger boats. You can do this either by taking a cruise, which you can book through agencies in the West or in Russia, or by using scheduled river passenger services. The season runs from late May through to mid-October, but is shorter on some routes.

There are numerous boats plying the routes between Moscow and St Petersburg, many stopping at some of the Golden Ring cities on the way; and along the Volga River from Moscow to other Trans-Siberian cities such as Nizhny Novgorod and Kazan. In Siberia and the Russian Far East there are services along the Ob and Irtysh Rivers (between Omsk and Tobolsk), the Yenisey from Krasnoyarsk, the Lena from Ust-Kut via Lensk to Yakutsk, the Amur from Khabarovsk to Komsomolsk, as well as across Lake Baikal from Irkutsk to Nizhneangarsk.

Beware that boat schedules can change radically from year to year (especially on Lake Baikal) and are only published infuriatingly close to the first sailing of each season.

Bus

Long-distance buses complement rather than compete with the rail network. They generally serve areas with no railway or routes on which trains are slow, infrequent or overloaded.

RUSSIA

Most cities have a main intercity автовокзал (*avtovokzal*, bus station). Like long-distance bus stations everywhere they are often scoundrel magnets, and are rarely pleasant places to visit after dark. Tickets are sold at the station or on the bus. Fares are normally listed on the timetable and posted on a wall. As often as not you'll get a ticket with a seat assignment, scribbled almost illegibly on a till receipt. Prices are comparable to 2nd-class train fares; journey times depend on road conditions. A sometimes hefty fee is charged for larger bags.

Marshrutky (a diminutive form of *marshrutnoye taksi*, meaning a fixed-route taxi) are minibuses that are quicker than the rusty old buses and rarely cost much more. Where roads are good and villages

frequent, *marshrutky* can be twice as fast as buses, and well worth the double fare.

CHINA

Chángtú gōnggōngqìchē (long-distance buses) are one of the best means of getting around China. Services are extensive, main roads are improving and with the increasing number of intercity highways, bus journeys are getting quicker (often quicker than train travel). It's also easier to secure bus tickets than train tickets and they are often cheaper. Buses also stop in small towns and villages, so you get to see parts of the countryside you wouldn't see if you travelled by train, although breakdowns can be a problem.

On the down side, some rural roads and provincial routes are in shocking condition, dangerously traversed by nerve-shattering hulks. Long-distance bus journeys can be cramped and noisy, with Hong Kong films on overhead TVs and three-dimensional sound. Drivers lean on the horn at the slightest detection of a vehicle in front.

Routes between large cities sport larger, cleaner and more comfortable fleets of private buses, such as comfy Volkvos; shorter and more far-flung routes still rely on rattling minibuses into which the driver crams as many fares as is possible.

On popular long-haul routes, *wòpù qìchē* (sleeper buses) may cost around double the price of a normal bus service, but many travellers swear by them. Some have comfortable reclining seats, while others have two-tier bunks. Watch out for your belongings on them, however.

Taxi

RUSSIA

There are two main types of taxis in Russia: the official ones, metered taxis you order by phone or the rarer four-door sedans with a chequerboard strip down the side and a green light in the front window that cruise the streets of Moscow; and 'private' taxis (any other vehicle on the road).

Hail rides by standing at the side of the road and flagging passing vehicles with a low, up-and-down wave (not an extended thumb). State your destination and negotiate the fare before getting in. You are expected to pitch in for petrol; paying what would be the normal bus fare for a long-haul ride is considered appropriate. If the driver's game,

they'll ask you to *sadites* (get in), but always act on the cautious side before doing this. Check with locals to determine the average taxi fare in that city at the time; taxi prices around the country vary widely. The better your Russian, generally the lower the fare. If possible, let a Russian negotiate for you: they'll do better than you will.

As a precaution have the taxi stop at the corner nearest your destination, not the exact address, if you're staying at a private residence. Trust your instincts. If a driver looks creepy, take the next car, and don't get in a car with more than one person inside.

TRAIN

For more detailed information about train travel in Mongolia and China, see Lonely Planet's *Mongolia* and *China* guides.

Russia

Russian trains have a remarkable record for punctuality, with most departing each station on their route to the minute allotted on the timetable. However, there are underlying reasons for this punctuality: managers have a large portion of their pay determined by the timeliness of their trains. This not only inspires promptness, but it results in the creation of generous schedules. You'll sometimes find your train stationary for hours in the middle of nowhere only to start up and roll into the next station on time.

Timetables are posted in stations and are revised twice a year. The Russian rail network mostly runs on Moscow time, so timetables and station clocks from St Petersburg to Vladivostok will be written in and set to Moscow time. The only exception is suburban services, which are listed in local time.

Most stations have an information window; expect the attendant to speak only Russian and to give a bare minimum of information. Sometimes you may have to pay a small fee (around R10) for information. See p332 for ways to crack the timetable code on your own.

CLASSES

The regular long-distance service is a *skory poezd* (fast train), which rarely gets up enough speed to merit being called 'fast', but is indeed much quicker than the frequently stopping *passazhirsky poezd* (passenger trains) found mainly on routes of

1000km or less. A *prigorodny poezd* (suburban train), nicknamed an *elektrichka*, is a local service linking a city and its suburbs or nearby towns, or groups of adjacent towns.

The premium trains are *firmennye poezdy* and often have proper names (eg *Rossiya*). These generally have cleaner and more upper-class carriages, polite attendants, more convenient arrival and departure times and a reasonable (or at least functioning) restaurant car. Sometimes the ticket prices will also include your linen and breakfast.

Russians make themselves very much at home on trains. This often means they'll be travelling with plenty of luggage. It also means some juggling of the available space will become inevitable.

In all but local trains there's a luggage bin underneath each of the lower berths that will hold a medium-sized backpack or small suitcase. There's also enough space beside the bin to squeeze in another medium-sized

bag. Above the doorway (in 1st and 2nd class) or over the upper bunks (in 3rd class) there's room for a couple more rucksacks.

In classes with sleeping accommodation you'll be asked if you want *pastil*. If you accept (recommended) you'll be given two sheets, a washcloth, a pillowcase and a blanket; you'll usually have to pay extra (R40 to R60) for this to the *provodnitsa* (carriage attendant). In 1st class the bed is often made up already and with some types of fare the cost of bedding is included.

All compartments are air-conditioned in summer and heated in winter – that's why the windows are locked shut (though sometimes you'll be able to open them). There a speaker above the window through which the *provodnitsa* can inflict her music on you – you can switch this off with the knob.

Note that no account is taken of sex when allocating a cabin, so a single woman might find herself sharing with three men. If you

don't feel comfortable, ask the *provodnitsa* if you can swap – it's often possible.

If you want true luxury, you'll need to shell out for the trips offered by companies such as **Mir Corporation** (☎ 206-624-7289; www.mircorp.com; Suite 210, 85 S Washington St, Seattle, WA 98104) in the US and **GW Travel Ltd** (☎ 0161-928 9410; www.gwtravel.co.uk; Denzell House, Denzell Gardens, Dunham Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QF) in the UK, which use private rail cars that are complete with plush compartments and showers.

Deluxe 1st class

These are only available on the 3/4 Trans-Mongolian train. These two-berth compartments are roomy, have wood-panelling, are carpeted and have a sofa. A shower cubicle is shared with the adjacent compartment.

1st Class – SV

Most often called SV (short for *spalny vagon*, or sleeping wagon), 1st-class compartments

are also called *myagky* (soft class) or *lyux*. They are the same size as 2nd class but have only two berths, so there's more room and privacy for double the cost. Some 1st-class compartments have TVs on which you can watch videos/DVDs supplied by the *provodnitsa* for a small fee (or bring your own). You can unplug the TV and plug in your computer or other electrical equipment. These carriages also have the edge in that there are only half as many people queuing to use the toilet every morning. So far, on only a couple of services (Moscow to St Petersburg and Moscow to Kazan) will you find luxury SV compartments each with their own shower and toilet.

2nd Class – Kupeyny

The compartments in a *kupeyny* (2nd class, also called 'compartmentalised') carriage (often shortened to *kupe*) are the standard accommodation on long-distance trains. These

READING A RUSSIAN TRAIN TIMETABLE

Russian train timetables generally list a destination, train number, category of train, frequency of service and time of departure and arrival, in Moscow time unless otherwise noted.

Trains in smaller city stations generally begin somewhere else, so you'll see a starting point and a destination on the timetable. For example, when catching a train from Yekaterinburg to Irkutsk, the timetable may list Moscow as an origination point and Irkutsk as the destination. The following are a few key points to look out for.

Number

The higher the номер (*nomer*, number) of a train, the slower it is; anything over 900 is likely to be a mail train. The number also indicates train standard: the lower the number, the higher the standard and the higher the price; if you want the best trains look for numbers under 100. Odd-numbered trains head towards Moscow; even-numbered ones head east away from the capital.

Category

Скорый (*Skory*, fast), Пассажи́рский (*Passazhirsky*, passenger), Почтовый-багажный (*Pochtovo-bagazhny*, post-cargo) and Пригородный (*Prigorodny*, suburban) – and various abbreviations thereof – are the categories you will encounter. There may also be the name of the train, eg 'Россия' (*Rossiya*).

Frequency

Frequency is shown as Ежедневно (*yezhdnevno*, daily), чётные (*chyotnye*, even-numbered dates), нечётные (*netchotnye*, odd-numbered dates) or отменён (*otmenyon*, cancelled). All of these, as well, can appear in various abbreviations, notably еж, ч, не and отмен. Days of the week are listed usually as numbers (where one is Monday and seven Sunday) or as abbreviations of the name of the day (Пон, Вт, Ср, Чт, Пт, С and Вск are, respectively, Monday to Sunday). Remember that time zone differences can affect these days. So in Chita (Moscow time plus six hours), a train timetabled at 23.20 on Tuesday actually leaves 5.20am on Wednesday.

In months with an odd number of days two odd days follow one another (eg 31 May, 1 June). This throws out trains working on an alternate-day cycle so if travelling near month's end pay special attention to the hard-to-decipher footnotes on a timetable (eg '27/V – 3/VI Ч means that from 27 May to 3 June the train runs on even dates).

On some trains, frequency depends on the time of year, in which case details are usually given in similar abbreviated small print.

Arrival & Departure Times

Most train times are given in a 24-hour time format, and almost always in Moscow time (Московское время, *Moskovskoye vremya*). But suburban trains are usually marked in local time (местное время, *mestnoe vremya*). From here on it gets tricky (as though the rest wasn't), so don't confuse the following:

- время отправления (*vremya otpravleniya*, time of departure)
- время отправления с начального пункта (*vremya otpravleniya s nachalnogo punkta*, time of departure from the train's starting point)
- время прибытия (*vremya pribytiya*, time of arrival at the station you're in)
- время прибытия на конечный пункт (*vremya pribytiya v konechny punkt*, time of arrival at the destination)
- время в пути (*vremya v puti*, duration of the journey)

Corresponding trains running in opposite directions on the same route may appear on the same line of the timetable. In this case you may find route entries like время отправления с конечного пункта (*vremya otpravleniya s konechnogo punkta*), or the time the return train leaves its station of origin.

Distance

You may sometimes see the расстояние (*rastoyaniye*, distance in kilometres from the point of departure) on the timetable as well. These are rarely accurate and usually refer to the kilometre distance used to calculate the fare.

Note that if you want to calculate where you are while on a journey, keep a close look out for the small black-and-white kilometre posts generally on the southern side of the track. These mark the distance to and from Moscow. In between each kilometre marker are smaller posts counting down roughly every 100m. The distances on train timetables don't always correspond to these marker posts (usually because the timetable distances are ones used to calculate fares).

carriages are divided into nine compartments, each with four reasonably comfortable berths, a fold-down table and enough room between bunks to turn around.

In every carriage there's also one half-sized compartment with just two berths. This is usually occupied by the *provodnitsa*, or reserved for railway employees, but there is

a slim chance that you may end up in it, particularly if you do a deal directly with a *provodnitsa* for a train ticket.

3rd Class – Platskartny

A reserved-place *platskartny* carriage, sometimes also called *zhyostky* ('hard class', or 3rd class) and usually abbreviated to *platskart*, is

essentially a dorm carriage sleeping 54. The bunks are uncompartimentalised and are arranged in blocks of four down one side of the corridor and in twos on the other, with the lower bunk on this side converting to a table and chairs during the day.

Platskart is ideal for single-night journeys. However, on multiday journeys the scene often resembles a refugee camp, with clothing strung between bunks, a swapping of bread, fish and tea and babies sitting on pot-ties while their snot-nosed siblings tear up and down the corridor. That said, many travellers (women in particular) find this a better option than being cooped up with three Russian men. It's also a great way to meet ordinary Russians. *Platskart* tickets cost half to two-thirds the price of a 2nd-class berth.

If you do travel *platskart*, it's worth requesting specific numbered seats when booking your ticket. The ones to avoid are 1 to 4, 33 to 38, 53 and 54, found at each end of the carriage, close to the samovar and toilets, where there is lots of activity. Note 39 to 52 are the doubles with the bunk that converts to a table – you may want to avoid these ones too, especially if you're tall.

4th Class – Obshchy

Also called 4th class, *obshchy* (general) is unreserved. On long-distance trains the *obshchy* carriage looks the same as a *platskart* one, but when full, eight people are squeezed into each unenclosed compartment so there's no room to lie down. Suburban trains normally have only *obshchy* class, which in this case means bench-type seating. On a few daytime-only intercity trains there are higher-grade *obshchy* carriages with more comfortable, reserved chairs.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Many train stations have either a secure camera хранения (*kamera khraneniya*, left-luggage room) or автоматические камеры хранения (*avtomaticheskiye kamery khraneniya*, left-luggage lockers). Make sure you note down the room's opening and closing hours and, if in doubt, establish how long you can leave your stuff for. Typical costs are R40 to R80 per bag per day (depending on size) or R72 per locker.

Here is how to work the left-luggage lockers (they're generally the same everywhere). Be suspicious of people who offer

SHE WHO MUST BE OBEYED

On any long-distance Russian train you'll soon learn who's in charge: the *provodnitsa* (carriage attendant). Although they are sometimes male (*provodniks*), these attendants are usually women, with some of the most distinctive hairdos you'll come across this side of a drag-queen convention.

Apart from checking your ticket before boarding the train, doling out linen and shaking you awake in the middle of the night when your train arrives, the *provodnitsa's* job is to keep her carriage tidy (some are more diligent at this than others) and to make sure the samovar is always fired up with hot water. They will have cups, plates and cutlery to borrow, if you need them, and can provide drinks and snacks for a small price; some have even been known to cook up meals and offer them around.

On long journeys *provodnitsas* work in teams of two; one will work while the other rests. Butter them up the right way and your journey will be all the more pleasant.

to help you work them, above all when it comes to selecting your combination.

- Buy two *zhetony* (tokens) from the attendant.
- Put your stuff in an empty locker.
- Decide on a combination of one Russian letter and three numbers and write it down.
- Set the combination on the inside of the locker door.
- Put one token in the slot.
- Close the locker.

To open the locker, set your combination on the outside of your locker door. Even though it seems as if the knobs on the outside of the door should correspond directly with those on the inside, the letter is always the left-most knob, followed by three numbers, on both the inside and the outside. After you've set your combination, put a token in the slot, wait a second for the electrical humming sound and then pull it open.

RESERVATIONS

At any station you'll be confronted by several ticket windows. Some are special windows reserved exclusively for the use of the

HOW TO READ YOUR TICKET

When buying a ticket in Russia you'll always be asked for your passport so that its number and your name can be printed on your ticket. The ticket and passport will be matched up by the *provodnitsa* (carriage attendant) before you're allowed on the train – so make sure the ticket-seller gets these details correct.

Most tickets are printed by computer and come with a duplicate. Shortly after you've boarded the train the *provodnitsa* will come around and collect the tickets; sometimes they will take both copies and give you one back just before your final destination, sometimes they will leave you with the copy. It's a good idea to hang onto this ticket, especially if you're hopping on and off trains, since it provides evidence of how long you've been in a particular place if you're stopped by police.

Sometimes tickets are also sold with separate chits for insurance in the event of a fatal accident (this is a small payment, usually less than R30); for linen; and for some or all meals. The following is a guide to deciphering the rest of what your Russian train ticket is about:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Train number | 8 Number of people travelling on ticket |
| 2 Train type | 9 Type of passenger: полный (<i>polny</i> , adult); детский (<i>detsky</i> , child); студенческий (<i>studenchesky</i> , student) |
| 3 Departure date – shows day and month | 10 From/to |
| 4 Departure time – always Moscow time for long-distance trains | 11 Bed number |
| 5 Carriage number and class: Л = two-bed SV; М = four-bed SV; К = <i>kupeyny</i> ; П = <i>platskartny</i> ; О = <i>obshchy</i> | 12 Passport number and name |
| 6 Supplement for class of ticket above <i>platskartny</i> | 13 Total cost of ticket |
| 7 Cost for <i>platskartny</i> ticket | 14 Tax and service fee |
| | 15 Arrival date |
| | 16 Arrival time – always Moscow time for long-distance trains |



elderly or infirm, heroes of the Great Patriotic War or members of the armed forces. All will have different operating hours and generally unhelpful staff.

The sensible option, especially if there are horrendous queues, is to avail yourself of the *servis tsentr* (service centre) found at most major stations. At these air-conditioned centres – a godsend in summer – you will generally encounter helpful, and sometimes English-speaking staff who, for a small fee (typically around R100), can book your ticket. In big cities and towns it's also usually possible to buy tickets at special offices and some travel agencies away from the station; again, individual chapters provide details.

Whoever you end up buying your ticket from, it's a good idea to have the following written down, in Cyrillic, to hand over to the sales assistant:

- your destination
- the train number
- date and time of departure
- class of ticket required
- number of tickets
- your name (though they'll check on your visa anyway)

When writing dates, use ordinary (Arabic) numerals for the day of the month and Roman numerals for the month. See p332 for more information.

Even if the ticket-sellers tell you a particular service is sold out, it still might be possible to get on the train by speaking with the chief *provodnitsa*. Tell her your destination, offer the face ticket price first, and move slowly upwards from there. You can usually come to some sort of agreement.

Tickets for suburban trains – which are very cheap – are often sold at separate windows or from *avtomaticheskkiye kassy* (ticket machines). A table beside the ticket machine tells you which price zone your destination is in.

STOPS

Every carriage has a timetable (in Cyrillic) posted in the corridor, which notes how long the train will stop at each station. These timetables, however, are not set in stone, so always ask the *provodnitsa* when getting off the train how long you're going to be at a station. Usually, stops last from two to five minutes, but at least twice a day the train

stops for 15 or 20 minutes, allowing time to get off, stretch your legs and stock up on food from sellers on the platform.

China

China has some 52,000km of domestic train lines, and this is in fact the most comfortable and reliable way to travel around the country. The network covers every province except Tibet.

Your degree of comfort on the train depends on your class of travel. The 'hard-seat' actually – technically – has padded seats. But this class is still hard on one's sanity, as it is generally dirty, noisy and smoky. You may or may not have a seat reservation. Some shorter journeys have *ruānxi/ruānzuo* (soft-seat) carriages, where overcrowding and smoking are not permitted. The *yingxi/yingzuo* (hard-sleeper) carriage consists of doorless compartments with half a dozen bunks in three tiers; this is the most common way for long-distance travel and quite acceptable for a night. 'Soft-sleeper' carriages have four comfortable bunks in a closed compartment; on Z class trains (the best) you'll also have your own TV. Z class trains also have luxury two-berth compartments with their own shower and toilet facilities.

Once you are on the train, the conductor may be able to upgrade your ticket if space is available in other carriages. The cost of the upgraded ticket is prorated to the distance travelled in the higher class. For more about trains in China, see www.seat61.com/china.htm.

Mongolia

Mongolia's rail network is primarily made up of the Trans-Mongolian Railway, with both the domestic and international trains using this same line. It was built during the Soviet era so there are lots of similarities between the Mongolian and Russian train systems. Note that you can't use the Trans-Mongolian Railway for domestic transport.

If you're travelling from Ulaanbaatar, it is important to book a soft seat well in advance – this can be done up to 10 days before departure. There may be a small booking fee. In general, booking ahead is a good idea for any class, though there will always be hard-seat tickets available.

Health

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Although on the whole Russians are far from a healthy people, the dangers to visitors are quite minimal. The same goes for China. As for Mongolia, its cold, dry climate and sparse human habitation mean there are few of the infectious diseases that plague tropical Asian countries. However, there are a few health issues to be aware of. This chapter offers very basic advice; for more details check the Internet resources provided and pick up Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India*.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while away. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Good emergency medical treatment is not cheap in this region, so seriously consider

taking out a policy that covers you for the worst possible scenario, such as an accident requiring an emergency flight home. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers (the preferable option) or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Diphtheria & Tetanus

Recommended for everyone, vaccinations for these two diseases are usually combined.

Hepatitis A

Vaccines including Avaxim, Havrix 1440 and VAQTA provide long-term immunity after an initial injection, then a booster at six to 12 months. Alternatively, an injection of gamma globulin can provide short-term immediate protection; it's reasonably effective, unlike the vaccine, but because it is a blood product, there are current concerns about its long-term safety. Hepatitis A vaccine is also available as Twinrix, combined with hepatitis B vaccine. Three injections over a six-month period are required, the first two providing substantial protection against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

This vaccination, involving three injections with a booster at 12 months, is recommended for Russia. Rapid courses are available.

Japanese B Encephalitis

Consider vaccination if spending a month or longer in parts of the Russian Far East and Siberia, or if making repeated trips to at-risk areas. It involves three injections over 30 days.

Polio

You should keep up to date with this vaccination, normally given in childhood – a booster every 10 years ensures immunity.

Rabies

Consider vaccination if you're spending a month or longer travelling, especially if cycling, handling animals, caving or travelling to remote areas; children should also

have it. Pretravel vaccination involves three injections over 21 to 28 days. If someone who has been vaccinated is bitten or scratched by an animal, they'll need two booster injections; those not vaccinated require more.

Tuberculosis

If you'll be living among local people in high-risk areas for three months or more, consider being vaccinated for TB.

Typhoid

Available as an injection or oral capsules. A combined hepatitis A/typhoid vaccine was launched recently but availability is limited; check with your doctor.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) publication *International Travel and Health* is revised annually and is available online at www.who.int/ith/. Other useful websites:

- www.ageconcern.org.uk – advice on travel for the elderly
- www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk – general travel advice for the layperson
- www.mariestopes.org.uk – information on women's health and contraception
- www.mdtravelhealth.com – travel health recommendations for every country; updated daily

IN RUSSIA, CHINA & MONGOLIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Medical care is readily available across Russia but the quality can vary enormously. The biggest cities and towns have the widest choice of places, with both Moscow and St Petersburg well served by sparkling international-style clinics that charge handsomely for their admittedly generally excellent and professional service; except to pay around US\$50 for an initial consultation.

Some foreigners (eg British) are theoretically entitled to free treatment in state-run noncommercial clinics, according to bilateral agreements from Soviet times. In practice this means that in Moscow they might be treated for free in cases of major injury. In remote areas doctors won't usually

SARS

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) health crisis continues to plague China and, in 2005, Russia. For the latest travel advisories, check the following websites (which are also good for general travel advice):

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mft.govt.nz)

UK (www.fco.gov.uk/travel)

US (www.travel.state.gov/travel/warnings.html)

charge you either, but it's recommended to give them gifts – like a bottle of Armenian cognac, chocolate or money.

In some cases, medical supplies required in hospital may need to be bought from a pharmacy and nursing care may be limited. Note that there can be an increased risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment.

Beijing and Harbin and other metropolitan areas of China have good medical facilities well up to international standards. Mongolia however suffers from a serious lack of medical facilities. In short, an ill person is better off in Ulaanbaatar than in the countryside, and better off in Beijing than in Ulaanbaatar. If you must obtain medical assistance in Mongolia, seek out a hospital or private clinic that caters to foreigners and be sure to bring a translator. In China and Mongolia expect to pay anything up to US\$100 for an initial consultation at a private clinic.

Apart from the chief *provodnitsa* (carriage attendant) probably having a first-aid box, there is no medical assistance available on the train itself.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Influenza

This will be your main health concern across Russia and China, particularly in winter. Symptoms include muscle ache, high fever, runny nose, cough and sore throat. Vaccination is particularly recommended for those aged 65 and over.

Rabies

Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal. It is always

fatal unless treated promptly. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of postbite vaccine is not available within 24 hours; see p337.

Tickborne Encephalitis

Spread by tick bites, this is a serious infection of the brain and vaccination is advised for those in risk areas who are unable to avoid tick bites (such as campers, forestry workers and walkers). Two doses of vaccine will give a year's protection, three doses up to three years'. For more information see www.masta.org/tickalert.

Typhoid & Hepatitis A

Spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water, typhoid can cause septicaemia (blood poisoning); hepatitis A causes liver inflammation and jaundice. Neither is usually fatal but recovery can be prolonged; see opposite and p337.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets) and steer clear of ice. Only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Eat food that is hot through and avoid buffet-style meals. If a restaurant is full of locals the food is probably safe.

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water.
- Check the seal on bottled water is intact on purchase.
- Avoid ice and fresh juices if you suspect they have been watered down.
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it. Trains have a samovar (hot-water heater) in every carriage.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

The temperatures on the trains are generally kept at a comfortable level, but once out in the wide open spaces of Russia, Mongolia and China the main environmental hazards to be careful of are heat exhaustion in summer and frostbite in the winter.

Heat Exhaustion & Heat Stroke

Best avoided by drinking water on a constant basis, heat exhaustion occurs following excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty. To treat heat exhaustion, replace lost fluids by drinking water and/or fruit juice, and cool the body with cold water and fans. Treat salt loss with salty fluids such as soup or Bovril, or add a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heat stroke is much more serious, resulting in irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is ideal. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is recommended.

Hypothermia & Frostbite

Proper preparation will reduce the risks of getting hypothermia. Even on a hot day in the mountains the weather can change rapidly; carry waterproof garments and warm layers, and inform others of your route.

Acute hypothermia follows a sudden drop of temperature over a short time. Chronic hypothermia is caused by a gradual loss of temperature over hours.

Hypothermia starts with shivering, loss of judgment and clumsiness. Unless re-warming occurs, the sufferer deteriorates

AVIAN INFLUENZA *Dr Trish Batchelor*

Avian influenza, or 'bird flu', presents only a very remote risk to travelers at this time. In 2004 and 2005 the avian H5N1 virus caused illness in domestic birds around the world. This virus is passed from healthy migratory birds to domestic birds such as chickens and ducks, which then may sicken and die. Transmission has occurred from domestic birds to humans; however, it is rare, and requires close contact with an infected bird or its droppings. By early December 2005 there were a total of 133 human cases confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO), and 68 people had died. These human cases occurred in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and China. At the time of writing, China had reported three human cases and two deaths.

The WHO recommends the following precautions for travellers to affected countries: avoid live poultry markets; avoid eating raw or undercooked poultry or eggs; wash hands frequently; and seek medical attention if you develop a fever and respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath etc).

You can keep up to date on the current situation by visiting the World Health Organization website (www.who.int/en).

into apathy, confusion and coma. Prevent further heat loss by seeking shelter, warm dry clothing, hot sweet drinks and shared bodily warmth.

Frostbite is caused by freezing and subsequent damage to bodily extremities. As it develops the skin blisters and then becomes black. Adequate clothing, staying dry, keeping well hydrated and ensuring adequate calorie intake best prevent frostbite. Treatment involves rapid rewarming. Avoid re-freezing and rubbing the affected areas.

Insect Bites & Stings**LEECHES**

You'll often find leeches in damp forest conditions; they attach themselves to your skin to suck your blood. Trekkers often get them on their legs or in their boots. Salt or a lighted cigarette end will make them fall off. Do not pull them off, as the bite is then more likely to become infected. Clean and apply pressure if the point of attachment is bleeding. An insect repellent may keep them away.

LYME DISEASE

This is a tick-transmitted infection that may be acquired throughout the region. The illness usually begins with a spreading rash at the site of the tick bite, accompanied by fever, headache, extreme fatigue, aching joints and muscles and mild neck stiffness. If untreated, these symptoms usually resolve over several weeks, but over subsequent months disorders of the nervous system, heart and joints may develop. There

is no vaccination against the disease. Treatment should be sought as soon as possible for best results.

MOSQUITOES

A problem in summer all across Russia, mosquitoes here may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. Use some form of insect repellent and keep covered up.

From May to September in the rural areas bordering Mongolia, China and North Korea, take extra special care as mosquito bites can cause Japanese encephalitis. If visiting rural areas you should consider the immunisation.

TICKS

From May to July, tick-borne encephalitis is a risk anywhere in rural Russia. Always check all over your body if you have been walking through a potentially tick-infested area as ticks can cause skin infections and other more serious diseases. If you find a tick attached, press down around its head with tweezers, grab the head and gently pull upwards. Avoid pulling the rear of the body as this may squeeze the tick's gut contents through the attached mouth parts into the skin, increasing the risk of infection. Smearing chemicals on the tick will not make it let go and is not recommended.

Snake Bites

Avoid getting bitten – do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not

actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site firmly, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite. Get the victim medical help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children under a year.

If your child is vomiting or has diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water.

Children should be encouraged to avoid and mistrust any dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual cycle. If using oral contraceptives, remember some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy – remember to take condoms with you just in case. Time zones, gastrointestinal upsets and antibiotics do not affect injectable contraception.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but always consult your doctor before planning your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and after 30 weeks.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Condoms are available across Russia, China and in Ulaanbaatar from pharmacies and

certainly should be used. The **International Planned Parent Federation** (www.ippf.org) can advise about the availability of contraception in different countries.

When buying condoms, look for a European CE mark, which means they have been rigorously tested, and then keep them in a cool dry place or they may crack and perish.

HIV & AIDS

Infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) may lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is a fatal disease. Russia is experiencing one of the fastest rises of reported HIV and AIDS cases in the world. China is also said to be on the brink of a major epidemic.

Any exposure to blood, blood products or body fluids may put the individual at risk. The disease is often transmitted through sexual contact or dirty needles – vaccinations, acupuncture, tattooing and body piercing can be potentially as dangerous as intravenous drug use. HIV/AIDS can also be spread through infected blood transfusions. If you do need an injection, ask to see the syringe unwrapped in front of you, or take a needle and syringe pack with you.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B can be transmitted through sexual contact; see the relevant sections earlier for more details. Other STDs include gonorrhoea, herpes and syphilis; sores, blisters or rashes around the genitals and discharges or pain when urinating are common symptoms. In some STDs, such as wart virus or chlamydia, symptoms may be less marked or not observed at all, especially in women. Chlamydia infection can cause infertility in men and women before any symptoms have been noticed. Syphilis symptoms eventually disappear completely but the disease continues and can cause severe problems in later years. While abstinence from sexual contact is the only 100% effective prevention, using condoms is also effective. The treatment of gonorrhoea and syphilis is with antibiotics. Different STDs each require specific antibiotics.

Language

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CHINESE

The Chinese spoken in Manchuria is the dialect spoken in Beijing. It is the official language of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and is usually referred to in the west as 'Mandarin' – the Chinese call it *pǔtōnghuà* (common speech).

For a more detailed guide to the language, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Mandarin Phrasebook*.

PRONUNCIATION

Chinese is a tone language. This means that variations in pitch within syllables are used to determine word meaning. For example, in Mandarin the word *ma* can have several different meanings, depending on which tone is used:

High tone: *mā*, 'mother'.

Rising tone: *má*, 'hemp' or 'numb'.

Falling-rising tone: *mǎ*, 'horse'.

Falling tone: *mà*, 'scold' or 'swear'.

In pinyin, apostrophes are sometimes used to separate syllables, eg *ping'an* prevents the word being pronounced as *pin'gan*. The English 'v' sound doesn't occur in Chinese. For beginners, the trickiest sounds are **ç**, **q** and **x** because their pronunciation isn't remotely similar to English.

c	as the 'ts' in 'bits'
ch	as in 'church', but with the tongue curled back
h	guttural, a bit like the 'ch' of 'loch'
q	as the 'ch' in 'chicken'
r	as the 's' in 'pleasure'
sh	as in 'ship', but with the tongue curled back
x	as the 'sh' in 'ship'

z	as the 'ds' in 'suds'
zh	as the 'j' in 'judge' but with the tongue curled back

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.	<i>Ni hǎo.</i>	你好
Goodbye.	<i>Zàijiàn.</i>	再见
Thank you.	<i>Xièxie.</i>	谢谢
You're welcome.	<i>Búkèqì.</i>	不客气
I'm sorry.	<i>Duìbùqǐ.</i>	对不起
May I ask your name?	<i>Nin guìxìng?</i>	您贵姓?
My (sur)name is ...	<i>Wǒ xìng ...</i>	我姓 ...
Where are you from?	<i>Ni shì cóng nǎr lái de?</i>	你是从 ... 哪儿来的?
I'm from ...	<i>Wǒ shì cóng ... lái de.</i>	我是从 ... 来的
No. (don't have)	<i>Méi yǒu.</i>	没有
No. (not so)	<i>Búshì.</i>	不是
No, I don't want it.	<i>Búyào.</i>	不要
I don't understand.	<i>Wǒ tīngbúdǒng.</i>	我听不懂
Could you speak more slowly, please?	<i>Qǐng nǐ shuō màn yídiǎn, hǎo ma?</i>	请你说慢一点, 好吗?

IN TOWN

How much is it?	<i>Duōshǎo qián?</i>	多少钱?
That's too expensive.	<i>Tài guile.</i>	太贵了
Bank of China	<i>Zhōngguó Yínháng</i>	中国银行
change money	<i>huàn qián</i>	换钱
telephone	<i>diànhuà</i>	电话
Where is the ...?	<i>... zài nǎlǐ?</i>	... 在哪里?
hotel	<i>lǚguǎn</i>	旅馆

EMERGENCIES – CHINESE

I'm sick.	<i>Wǒ shēng bìng.</i>	我生病
Help!	<i>Jiùmìng a!</i>	救命啊
Thief!	<i>Xiǎo tóu!</i>	小偷
emergency	<i>jǐnjí qínghuàng</i>	紧急情况
hospital	<i>yiyuàn</i>	医院
police	<i>jǐngchá</i>	警察
foreign affairs police	<i>wàishì jǐngchá</i>	外事警察

tourist hotel

<i>bīnguǎn/fàdiàn/</i>	宾馆/饭店/
<i>jiǔdiàn</i>	酒店

Is there a room vacant?

<i>Yǒu méiyǒu kōng fángjiān?</i>	有没有空房间?
----------------------------------	---------

Yes, there is/No, there isn't.

<i>Yǒu/Méiyǒu.</i>	有/没有
--------------------	------

single room

<i>dānrénfáng</i>	单人房
-------------------	-----

twinn room

<i>shuāngrénfáng</i>	双人房
----------------------	-----

toilet (restroom)

<i>cèsuǒ</i>	厕所
--------------	----

men/women

<i>nan/nǚ</i>	男/女
---------------	-----

toilet paper

<i>wèishēng zhǐ</i>	卫生纸
---------------------	-----

bathroom (washroom)

<i>xǐshǒu jiān</i>	洗手间
--------------------	-----

TRAIN TALK

train station	<i>hǎochē zhàn</i>	火车站
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ticket office	<i>shùupiào chù</i>	售票处
----------------------	---------------------	-----

I want to go to ...

<i>Wǒ yào qù ...</i>	我要去 ...
----------------------	---------

buy a ticket	<i>mǎi piào</i>	买票
---------------------	-----------------	----

one ticket	<i>yízhāng piào</i>	一张票
-------------------	---------------------	-----

two tickets	<i>liǎngzhāng piào</i>	两张票
--------------------	------------------------	-----

hard-seat	<i>yìngxí/yìngzuò</i>	硬席/硬座
------------------	-----------------------	-------

soft-seat	<i>ruǎnxí/ruǎnzuò</i>	软席/软座
------------------	-----------------------	-------

hard-sleeper

<i>yìngwò</i>	硬卧
---------------	----

soft-sleeper

<i>ruǎnwò</i>	软卧
---------------	----

NUMBERS

0	<i>líng</i>	零
1	<i>yí/yāo</i>	一/幺
2	<i>èr/liǎng</i>	二/两
3	<i>sān</i>	三
4	<i>sì</i>	四
5	<i>wù</i>	五
6	<i>liù</i>	六
7	<i>qī</i>	七
8	<i>bā</i>	八
9	<i>jiǔ</i>	九
10	<i>shí</i>	十
11	<i>shíyī</i>	十一
12	<i>shí'èr</i>	十二
20	<i>èrshí</i>	二十
21	<i>èrshíyī</i>	二十一
100	<i>yībǎi</i>	一百
200	<i>liǎngbǎi</i>	两百
1000	<i>yīqiān</i>	一千

MONGOLIAN

The official national language of Mongolia is Mongolian. Since 1944, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet has been used to write Mongolian (see p345). The only difference between Mongolian and Russian Cyrillic is that the Mongolian version has two additional characters (Ө and У), for a total of 35. Double vowels indicate that the vowel is stressed.

For a more detailed look at the language, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Mongolian Phrasebook*.

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.

<i>sain bai-na uu</i>	Сайн байна уу?
(literally: How are you?)	

Fine. How are you?

<i>sain ta sain bai-na uu</i>	Сайн. Та сайн байна уу?
-------------------------------	-------------------------

What's new?

<i>so-nin sai-khan</i>	Сонин сайхан
<i>yu bai-na</i>	юу байна?

Nothing really.

<i>tai-van sai-khan</i>	Тайван сайхан.
(literally: It's peaceful.)	

Goodbye.

<i>ba-yar-tai</i>	Баяртай.
-------------------	----------

EMERGENCIES – MONGOLIAN

Help!

tus-*laa*-rai
Туслаарай!

Call a doctor!

emch duu-*daa*-rai!
Эмч дуудаарай!

I'm ill.

mi-*ni* bi-ye öv-döj bai-na
Миний бие өвдөж байна.

What's your name?

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

My name is ...

mi-*ni* ne-riig ... ge-deg Миний нэрийг ... гэдэг.

Yes.

tiim Тийм.

No.

ü-*güi* Үгүй.

Thanks.

ba-yar-*la-laa* Баярлалаа.

Excuse me.

uuch-*laa*-rai Уучлаарай.

What country are you from?

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

I'm from ...

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

Do you speak English?

ta an-*gllar* yair-*dag* uu Та англиар ярьдаг уу?

I don't understand.

bi oil-*gokh*-*güi* bai-na Би ойлгохгүй байна.

Do you have a (town) map?

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

Where's the train station?

galt te-re-ge-*ni* buud-*al* khaa-na bai-*dag* ve
галт тэрэгний буудал хаана байдаг вэ?

hotel

zo-*chid* buu-*dal*
зочид буудал

Do you have any rooms available?

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

I'd like a single room.

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

I'd like a double room.

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

What's the price per night/week?

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

RUSSIAN

Russian is written in variants of the Cyrillic alphabet (see p345). It's easy to find English speakers in the big cities but not so easy in the smaller towns (sometimes not even in tourist hotels).

For a more detailed guide to the language, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Russian Phrasebook*.

PRONUNCIATION

The 'voiced' consonants (ie when the vocal cords vibrate) **б, в, г, д, ж**, and **з** are not voiced at the end of words (eg хлеб, 'bread', is pronounced *khlyep*) or before voiceless consonants.

Two letters have no sound but are used to modify the pronunciation other letters. A consonant followed by the 'soft sign' **ь** is spoken with the tongue flat against the palate, as if followed by a faint 'y'. The 'hard sign' **ъ** is rarely seen; it occurs after consonants and indicates a slight pause before the next vowel.

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

Two words you're sure to use are the universal 'hello', здравствуйте (*zdrast-vuy-te*), and пожалуйста (pa-*zhal*-sta), the word for 'please' (commonly included in all polite requests), 'you're welcome', 'pardon me', 'after you' and more.

Hello.

zdrast-vuy-te Здравствуйте.

Hi.

pri-vyet Привет.

Good morning.

do-bra-e u-tra Доброе утро.

Good afternoon.

do-bri dyen' Добрый день.

Good evening.

dob-ri vye-cher Добрый вечер.

Goodbye.

da svi-da-ni-ya До свидания.

Bye.

pa-ka Пока.

How are you?

kak de-la Как дела?

What's your name?

kak vas za-vut Как вас зовут?

My name is ...

me-nya za-vut ... Меня зовут ...

THE RUSSIAN CYRILLIC ALPHABET

Cyrillic	Roman	Pronunciation
А, а	a	as the 'a' in 'father' (in stressed syllable); as the 'a' in 'ago' (in unstressed syllable)
Б, б	b	as the 'b' in 'but'
В, в	v	as the 'v' in 'van'
Г, г	g	as the 'g' in 'god'
Д, д	d	as the 'd' in 'dog'
Е, е	ye/e	as the 'ye' in 'yet' (in stressed syllable and at the beginning of a word); as the 'e' in 'ten' (in unstressed syllable)
Ё, ё *	yo	as the 'yo' in 'yore'
Ж, ж	zh	as the 's' in 'measure'
З, з	z	as the 'z' in 'zoo'
И, и	i	as the 'ee' in 'meet'
Й, й	y	as the 'y' in 'boy' (not transliterated after ы or и)
К, к	k	as the 'k' in 'kind'
Л, л	l	as the 'l' in 'lamp'
М, м	m	as the 'm' in 'mad'
Н, н	n	as the 'n' in 'not'
О, о	o/a	as the 'o' in 'more' (in stressed syllable); as the 'a' in 'hard' (in unstressed syllable)
П, п	p	as the 'p' in 'pig'
Р, р	r	as the 'r' in 'rub' (rolled)
С, с	s	as the 's' in 'sing'
Т, т	t	as the 't' in 'ten'
У, у	u	as the 'oo' in 'fool'
Ф, ф	f	as the 'f' in 'fan'
Х, х	kh	as the 'ch' in 'Bach'
Ц, ц	ts	as the 'ts' in 'bits'
Ч, ч	ch	as the 'ch' in 'chin'
Ш, ш	sh	as the 'sh' in 'shop'
Щ, щ	shch	as 'sh-ch' in 'fresh chips'
Ъ, ъ	-	'hard sign' (see p344)
Ы, ы	i	as the 'i' in 'ill'
Ь, ь	'	'soft sign'; (see p344)
Э, э	e	as the 'e' in 'end'
Ю, ю	yu	as the 'u' in 'use'
Я, я	ya/ye	as the 'ya' in 'yard' (in stressed syllable); as the 'ye' in 'yearn' (in unstressed syllable)

* Ё, ё are often printed without dots

Where are you from?

at-ku-da vi Откуда вы?

I'm from ...

ya iz ... Я из ...

Yes.

da Да.

No.

nyet Нет.

Please.

pa-zhal-sta Пожалуйста.

Thank you (very much).

(bal'-*sho-e*) spa-*si*-ba (Большое) спасибо.

Excuse me.

pras-ti-te Простите.

I'm sorry.

iz-vi-ni-te Извините.

No problem/Never mind.

ni-che-vo Ничего.

Do you speak English?

vi ga-va-ri-te pa an-*gll*-*ski*
Вы говорите по-английски?

I don't understand.

ya nye pa-ni-ma-yu
Я не понимаю.

Could you write it down, please?

za-pi-shi-te pa-*zhal*-*sta*
Запишите, пожалуйста?

Can you help me, please?

pa-ma-gi-te pa-*zhal*-*sta*
Помогите, пожалуйста.

IN TOWN

I need ...

mnye nuzh-na ... Мне нужно ...

Do you have ...?

u vas yest' ... У вас есть ...?

How much is it?

skol'-ka sto-it Сколько стоит?

Where is ...?

gdye ... Где ...?

hotel

gas-ti-ni-tsa гостиница

room

no-mer номер

telephone

*te-le-fo*n телефон

Toilet

tu-a-let Туалет

Men

muzh-skoy Мужской (М)

Women

zhen-ski Женский (Ж)

Do you have a ... room?

u vas yest' ... У вас есть ...?

single

ad-na-myest-ni no-mer
одноместный номер

double

no-mer z dvu-*spal'*-ney kra-*va*-t'yu
номер с двухспальной кроватью

EMERGENCIES – RUSSIAN

I'm ill.

ya bo-len (m)	Я болен.
ya bal'-na (f)	Я больна.

I need a doctor.

mnye nuzh-na vra-ch	Мне нужно врач.
---------------------	-----------------

hospital

bal'-ni-tsa	больница
-------------	----------

the police

mi-li-tsi-yu	милицию
--------------	---------

Help!

pa-ma-gi-te	Помогите!
-------------	-----------

Thief!

vor	Вор!
-----	------

Where is the toilet?

gdye zdyes' tu-al-yet	Где здесь туалет?
-----------------------	-------------------

How much is a room?

skol'-ka sto-it no-mer	Сколько стоит номер?
------------------------	----------------------

Do you have a cheaper room?

u vas yest' de-shyev-le	У вас есть дешевле номер?
no-mer	

TRAIN TALK

I want to go to ...

ya kha-chu ye-khat' v ...	Я хочу ехать в ...
---------------------------	--------------------

When is the next train?

kag-da slye-du-yu-shchi po-est	Когда следующий поезд?
--------------------------------	------------------------

When does it leave?

kag-da at-prav-lya-e-tsy-a	Когда отправляется?
----------------------------	---------------------

Are there SV/kupe/platskartny tickets on train number ... to ...?

yest' bi-lye-ti dlya es ve/dlya ku-pe/f plats-kar-te na po-est no-mer ... na ...	Есть билеты для СВ/для купе/в плацкарте на поезд номер ... до ...?
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------

I'd like to buy an SV/kupe/platskartny ticket for train number ... to ...

ya kha-tyel (m)/kha-tye-la (f) bi ku-pit' bi-lyet dlya es ve/ dlya ku-pe/f plats-kar-te na po-est no-mer ... na ...	Я хотел/хотела бы купить билет для СВ/ для купе/в плацкарте на поезд номер ... до ...
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Which platform does the train leave from?

s ka-koy plat-for-mi at-kho-dit po-est	С какой платформы отходит поезд?
----------------------------------------	----------------------------------

Please tell me why I can't buy a ticket.

ska-zhi-te pa-zhal-sta pa-che-mu ya nye ma-gu ku-pit' bi-lye-ta	Скажите пожалуйста почему я не могу купить билета!
-----------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------

There's no train today.

se-vod-nya nye bu-det pa-ez-da	Сегодня не будет поезда.
--------------------------------	--------------------------

The train is full.

fsye bi-lye-ti na et-at po-est pro-da-ni	Все билеты на этот поезд проданы. (literally: all tickets are sold)
------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------

There are no SV/kupe/platskartny tickets left for the train.

bi-lye-ti dlya es ve/dlya ku-pe/f plats-kar-te u-zhve vsye ras-pra-da-lis'	Билеты для СВ/для купе/в плацкарте уже все распродались.
----------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------

Tickets for that service aren't on sale until ...

bi-lye-ti na e-tat go-rat bu-dut na pra-da-zhe s ...	Билеты на этот город будут на продаже с ...
------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------

You're at the wrong ticket window. Please go to window ...

vi sta-i-te nye f tom myes-te a-bra-shchay-tes' k a-kosh-ku ...	Вы стоите не в том месте. Обращайтесь к окошку ...!
-----------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------

map

kar-ta	карта
--------	-------

platform

plat-for-ma	платформа
-------------	-----------

train station

zhe-lez-na-da-rozh-ni	железнодорожный (ж. д.) вокзал
-----------------------	--------------------------------

ticket, tickets

bi-lyet, bi-lye-ti	билет, билеты
--------------------	---------------

ticket office

bi-lyet-na-ya ka-sa	билетная касса
---------------------	----------------

timetable

ras-pi-sa-ni-e	расписание
----------------	------------

one-way

v a-din kan-yets	в один конец
e-di-ni	единый

return, round trip

tu-da i a-brat-na	туда и обратно
-------------------	----------------

baggage

ba-gazh	багаж
---------	-------

arrival

pri-bi-ti-e	прибытие
-------------	----------

departure

at-prav-lye-ni-e	отправление
------------------	-------------

TIME, DAYS & NUMBERS

When?

kag-da	Когда?
--------	--------

At what time?

f ka-to-ram cha-su	В котором часу?
--------------------	-----------------

today

se-vod-nya	сегодня
------------	---------

tomorrow

zaf-ta	завтра
--------	--------

day after tomorrow

pos-le-zaf-ta	послезавтра
---------------	-------------

yesterday

vche-ra	вчера
---------	-------

Dates are given day-month-year, with the month usually in Roman numerals. Days of the week are often represented by numbers in timetables (Monday is 1).

Monday

pa-ne-dyel'-nik	понедельник
-----------------	-------------

Tuesday

ftor-nik	вторник
----------	---------

Wednesday

sre-da	среда
--------	-------

Thursday

chet-vyerk	четверг
------------	---------

Friday

pyat-ni-tsa	пятница
-------------	---------

Saturday

su-bo-ta	суббота
----------	---------

Sunday

vas-kre-syen'-e	воскресенье
-----------------	-------------

January

yan-var'	январь
----------	--------

February

fev-ral'	февраль
----------	---------

March

mart	март
------	------

April

ap-ryel'	апрель
----------	--------

May

may	май
-----	-----

June

i-yun'	июнь
--------	------

July

i-yul'	июль
--------	------

August

av-gust	август
---------	--------

September

sen-tyabr'	сентябрь
------------	----------

October

ok-tyabr'	октябрь
-----------	---------

November

na-yabr'	ноябрь
----------	--------

December

de-kabr'	декабрь
----------	---------

How much/many?

skol'-ka	Сколько?
----------	----------

1

a-din один

2

dva два

3

tri три

4

che-ti-re четыре

5

pyat' пять

6

shyest' шесть

7

syem' семь

8

vo-sem' восемь

9

dye-tyat' девять

10

dye-syat' десять

11

a-di-na-tsatsat' одиннадцать

12

dve-na-tsatsat' двенадцать

13

tri-na-tsatsat' тринадцать

14

che-tir-na-tsatsat' четырнадцать

15

pyat-na-tsatsat' пятнадцать

16

shest-na-tsatsat' шестнадцать

17

sem-na-tsatsat' семнадцать

18

va-sem-na-tsatsat' восемнадцать

19

de-vyat-na-tsatsat' девятнадцать

20

dva-tsatsat' двадцать

21

dva-tsatsat' a-din двадцать один

22

dva-tsatsat' dva двадцать два

30

tri-tsatsat' тридцать

40

so-rak сорок

50

pyat'-des-yat пятьдесят

60

shes-des-yat шестдесят

70

syem'-des-yat семьдесят

80

vo-sem'-de-syat восемьдесят

90

de-vya-no-sta девяносто

100

sto сто

1000

ti-sya-cha тысяча

1,000,000

(a-din) mi-li-on (один) миллион

Glossary

This glossary is a list of Russian (R), Chinese (C) and Mongolian (M) terms you may come across during your Trans-Siberian journey. See p73 for words that will help you while dining.

aimag (M) – province or state within Mongolia

airag (M) – fermented mare's milk

apteka (R) – pharmacy

arkhi (M) – the common word to describe homemade vodka

avtostantsiya (R) – bus stop

avtovokzal (R) – bus terminal

babushka (R) – grandmother

BAM (R) – Baikalo-Amurskaya Magistral (Baikal-Amur Mainline)

bankomat (R) – ATM

banya (R) – bathhouse

bashnya (R) – tower

bei (C) – north

benzin (R) – petrol

biblioteka (R) – library

binguan (C) – tourist hotel

biznesmen, biznesmenka (R) – literally, businessman/woman, but often used to mean a small-time operator on the fringe of the law

Bogd Gegen (M) – hereditary line of reincarnated Buddhist leaders of Mongolia, the third highest in the Buddhist hierarchy, which started with Zanabazar

Bogd Khaan (M) – Holy King; title given to the eighth Bogd Gegen (1869–1924)

bolnitsa (R) – hospital

bulvar (R) – boulevard

CAAC (C) – Civil Aviation Administration of China, which controls most of China's domestic and foreign airlines

CCP (C) – Chinese Communist Party

CIS (R) – Commonwealth of Independent States; an alliance of independent states comprising the former USSR republics, with the exception of the three Baltic countries

CITS (C) – China International Travel Service

CTS (C) – China Travel Service

dacha (R) – country cottage, summer house

dajie (C) – avenue

datsan (R) – Buddhist monastery

detsky (R) – child's, children's

dezurnaya (R) – woman looking after a particular floor of a hotel

dom (R) – house

dong (C) – east

duma (R) – parliament

dvorets (R) – palace

elektrichka (R) – suburban train

fen (C) – one-tenth of a jiao, in Chinese currency

GAI (R) – Gosudarstvennaya Avtomobilnaya Inspektsiya; State Automobile Inspectorate (traffic police)

gavan (R) – harbour

gazeta (R) – newspaper

ger (M) – traditional, circular felt yurt

gol (M) – river

gorod (R) – city, town

gostinitsa (R) – hotel

gostiny dvor (R) – trading arcade

gudamj (M) – street

Gulag (R) – Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerey (Main Administration for Camps); the Soviet network of concentration camps

GUM (R) – Gosudarstvenny Univermag; State Department Store

hu (C) – lake

hutong (C) – narrow alleyway

Inner Mongolia (M) – a separate province within China

Intourist (R) – the old Soviet State Committee for Tourism, now hived off, split up and in competition with hundreds of other travel agencies

izba (R & M) – traditional single-storey wooden house

Jebtzun Damba (M) – also known as Bogd Gegen; a hereditary line of reincarnated spiritual leaders of Mongolia

jiao (C) – one-tenth of a yuan, in Chinese currency

jie (C) – street

kamera khraneniya (R) – left-luggage room

karta (R) – map, or multiride metro pass cards

kassa (R) – ticket office, cashier's desk

Kazakh (M) – Turkic ethnic group from Central Asia, also found in the west of Mongolia; people from Kazakhstan

KGB (R) – Komitet Gosydarstvennoy Bezopasnosti; Committee of State Security

khaan (M) – a king or chief

Khalkh (M) – the major ethnic group living in Mongolia

khiid (M) – Buddhist monastery

khoro (M) – traditional Mongolian game similar to checkers

khram (R) – church

kino (R) – cinema

kladbishche (R) – cemetery

kniga (knigi) (R) – book (books)

komnaty otdykha (R) – literally 'resting rooms'; cheap lodgings in Siberian train stations

Komsomol (R) – Communist Youth League

kopek (R) – kopeck; the smallest, worthless unit of Russian currency

kray (R) – territory

kreml (R) – kremlin, a town's fortified stronghold

Kuomintang (C) – Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist Party, the dominant political force after the fall of the Qing dynasty; now Taiwan's major political party

kupeyny (R) – kupe; compartmentalised carriage

lama (M) – Tibetan Buddhist monk or priest

lavra (R) – senior monastery

Living Buddha (M) – common term for reincarnations of Buddhas; Buddhist spiritual leader in Mongolia

lu (C) – road

lyux (R) – a lyux room in a hotel is a kind of suite, with a sitting room in addition to the bedroom and bathroom

Mafia (R) – anyone who has anything to do with crime, from genuine gangsters to victims of their protection rackets; also applied to anyone who's successful at anything

magazin (R) – shop

Manchus (C) – non-Chinese ethnic group from Manchuria (present-day northeast China) which took over China and established the Qing dynasty

manezh (R) – riding school

marshrutky (R) – minibus that runs along a fixed route

matryoshka (R) – set of painted wooden dolls stacked within dolls

mestnoe vremya (R) – local time

militsia (R) – police

more (R) – sea

morin khuur (M) – horsehead fiddle

most (R) – bridge

MPRP (M) – Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party

muzey (R) – museum; also some palaces, art galleries and nonworking churches

muzhskoy (R) – men's (toilet)

Naadam (M) – game; the Naadam Festival

naberezhnaya (R) – embankment

nan (C) – south

novy (R) – new

nuruu (M) – mountain range

oblast (R) – region

obshchy (R) – 4th-class train compartment

okrug (R) – district

örgön chöölöö (M) – avenue

ovoo (M) – shamanistic collection of stones, wood or other offerings to the gods, usually placed in high places

ozero (R) – lake

Paskha (R) – Easter

pereryv (R) – break (when shops, ticket offices, restaurants etc close for an hour or two during the day)

pereuok (R) – lane

peshchera (R) – cave

Pinyin (C) – the system of writing the Chinese language in the roman alphabet adopted by the Communist Party in 1958

PLA (C) – People's Liberation Army

platskartny (R) – platskart; open carriage on a train

ploshchad (R) – square

poezd (R) – train

posolstvo (R) – embassy

PRC (C) – People's Republic of China

prichal (R) – landing, pier

prigorodny poezd (R) – suburban train

prospekt (R) – avenue

provodnik, provodnitsa (R) – carriage attendant on a train

PSB (C) – Public Security Bureau; the arm of the police force that deals with foreigners

rayon (R) – district

rechnoy vokzal (R) – river terminal

remont, na remont (R) – closed for repairs

Renminbi (C) – literally 'people's money', the formal name for the currency of China; shortened to RMB

Rozhdestvo (R) – Christmas

rubl (R) – rouble

sad (R) – garden

samovar (R) – urn with an inner tube filled with hot charcoal used for heating water for tea

selo (R) – village

shagai (M) – traditional Mongolian dice game

shosse (R) – highway

siheyuan (C) – traditional courtyard house

sobor (R) – cathedral

soviet (R) – council

stupa (M) – Buddhist religious monument composed of a solid hemisphere topped by a spire, containing relics of the Buddha; also known as a pagoda, or suburgan in Mongolian

süm (M) – Buddhist temple

taiga (R) – northern pine, fir, spruce and larch forest

teatr (R) – theatre

tögrög (M) – unit of currency in Mongolia

traktir (R) – tavern

troika (R) – vehicle drawn by three horses

Tsagaan Sar (M) – ‘white moon’ or ‘white month’; a festival to celebrate the start of the lunar year

tserkov (R) – church

tualet (R) – toilet

ulitsa (R) – street

univermag, universalnyy magazin (R) – department store

urtyn-duu (M) – traditional singing style

uul (M) – mountain

vokzal (R) – station

vostok (R) – east

xi (C) – west

yezhdnevno (R) – daily

yuan (C) – the Chinese unit of currency, also referred to as RMB

zal (R) – hall, room

zapovednik (R) – nature reserve

zhenskiy (R) – women’s (toilet)