



Experience Naadam Train

Along the way
 Moscow
 Irkutsk
 Ulaanbaatar
 Beijing

Leaving from Moscow to Beijing

NAADAM is Mongolia's biggest and most uproarious festival of the calendar year. Mongolia's extreme climate (hot summers, freezing Siberian winters) mean that rural communities (who make up 75% of the population) are cut off in winter, when deep snow makes all but major roads impassable. To make-up for a lack of New Year festivities (in any case Mongolians mark the Lunar New Year), Mongolians go berserk at Naadam instead.



What's included

FULL ON

Train

- > 4-berth rail for complete journey (pre-assigned berths)
- > option to upgrade to 2-berth

Moscow

- > transfer on arrival to your hotel
- > 2 nights 3★ hotel, breakfast
- > 3 hour personalised walking tour with local expert
- > transfer to the station on departure

Irkutsk

- > all transportation
- > 3 nights 3★ hotel, Listvyanka Village, breakfast
- > excursion option

Ulaanbaatar

- > all transportation
- > 4 nights Elstei Ger Lodge (tourist Lodge), all meals
- > 3 nights Bayan Unjuul Ger Camp all meals
- > 1 night 4★ hotel, breakfast
- > City tour of Ulaanbaatar

In the know...

The word “Kremlin” isn’t Russian – it’s from a medieval Tartar word meaning “fortress”. There used to be kremlins all over Russia in the days when the Mongols were a threat. There’s even one in Siberia, at Tobolsk.

“Siberia” means “the sleeping land” and isn’t a Russian word – it comes from the Tartar name for the area, “Sibir”.

Lake Baikal is the world’s largest, and has more statistics than any other lake.

Genghis Khan’s name is correctly spelt “Chinghiskhan”, although his name at birth was Temujin. Despite his reputation for ferocity, the oldest annals of Mongolian history reveal he was frightened of dogs.



No ordinary trip

At The Russia Experience we like to ditch the clichés, discard the puff and concentrate on what we do best – bringing to life the world’s longest train route: the places visited, the encounters made and the realisation of a journey that is both engaging and rewarding.

We continually look at ways of enhancing the Trans Siberian experience, incorporating seasonal considerations (such as the Harbin Ice Festival), providing the historical context (pay a visit to the only remaining Soviet Gulag) or inviting you to savour the diverse cultural influences of indigenous people (sit down with a shaman, or enjoy the Siberian art of throat singing!).

We have no group departures, our advertised dates always operate (barring anything completely out of our control) and, above all, we will tell you it like it is – allowing you to make the right choice from a portfolio of journeys rich in variety and full of memorable experiences. Sorry! We couldn’t resist at least one cliché!



Visa Requirements

Visitors to Russia, Mongolia and China require visas. These must be obtained prior to departure. Visa processing times for these countries can be up to;

Russia	10 Working Days
Mongolia	06 Working Days
China	07 Working Days

However fast track processing is possible.

Due to the support documents required by the Embassy of Russia (which we obtain), you will need to book your trip before starting to obtain visas.

For full information regarding visas, please refer to our web site.

Hints and Tips

TOP TIP! – Popular time of year to travel so book early!

Photocopy your passport including the visas issued pages, airline tickets and insurance policies.

Your passport must be valid for at least six months past the end of your travel dates.

Travellers Checklist

Day pack, back pack, money belt, first aid kit, heat proof mug, instant coffee, tea bags, sun hat, mosquito repellent, lightweight jacket, flip flops, swim wear, sun cream, warm jacket (Sep-Apr departures), ski clothing. (For those participating), warm waterproof walking boots, photographs of home to show the Nomads, Mongolian children love bubbles!, universal sink plug, bottle opener.

Climate and time – Minimum/maximum Temperatures °C

	May/Jun	Jul/Aug
Moscow	+15/+22	+15/+30
Irkutsk	+8/+22	+26/+38
Ulaanbaatar	+15/+24	+26/+42
Beijing	+15/+22	+24/+30

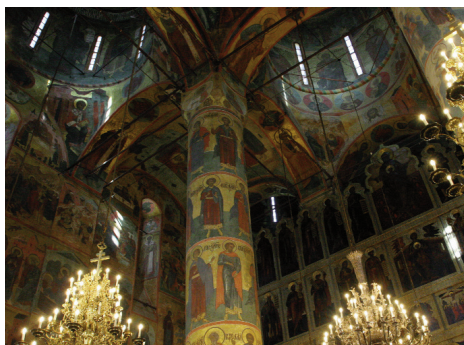
Experience Naadam Train

full on itinerary – 21 days

Naadam is the traditional three-day festival of “manly sports” - the biggest event on the Mongolian calendar. In fact it is celebrated across Central Asia in different ways. Before the Socialist revolution in 1924, Naadam included many aspects of both Buddhism and Shamanism, including elaborate mask-dancing and processions. These elements were stamped-out by the Communist authorities and eradicated. After communism collapsed in Mongolia, the mask-dancers were allowed to participate in the Opening Parade, but no mask ceremonies or Buddhist rituals are included. The main thing is the sports – wrestling, archery, flicking dried sheep’s ankle-bones at a target (harder than it sounds!), and the biggest spectacle of all – the horse-racing. All the events go on in parallel, and aficionados go to see what interests them most. Foreign visitors tend to dip-in and watch a bit of everything, and also take a wander round the many souvenir-stands and food-stalls that pop-up around the arenas. Mongolia’s population is spread thinly over huge areas of land (three times the size of Germany, but with the population of just one small German city), and the harsh winters make travel impossible for many small communities in wintertime – the summer festival of Naadam has always been not only a ceremonial and sporting event, but a chance to visit distant friends and relations, enjoy a chitchat, something of an annual fair, and also a chance for young people in isolated communities to perhaps find a spouse? The organisation of the events (mostly by the sports fans who participate in them) can sometimes be rather chaotic – so be prepared for schedule changes, and a lot of traffic jams!

DAY 01

“S Priezdom! Welcome to Moscow!” Our driver will be there to meet you from whichever flight, train or boat you arrive. You’ll then be transferred to the Panorama 3★ Hotel. The facilities available at this hotel include a Restaurant, Lobby Bar, Lobby Wi-Fi access,



Luggage Room, Safety deposit boxes and an ATM machine. At check-in, (after 2pm) the hotel reception will advise you they will need your passport for visa registration. This process takes 1–2 hours. Your complimentary InfoPack is full of ideas for getting the most out of your free time. (Please note your Trans-Siberian train tickets will be delivered to the hotel during your two night stay.)

No meals

DAY 02

After breakfast one of our local expert staff will meet you at the hotel to take you on a three hour walking tour round the highlights – you’ll use public transport around the centre to avoid the traffic jams and get the hang of the system for when you come to use it independently. Our staffers are full of ideas for this walk but are flexible about other ideas if you have your own. Your walk ends in the city centre around lunchtime. If you haven’t pre-booked any of our range of city excursions the rest of the day is your own to explore further. Some of our top suggestions (please check opening times/days before setting off) would include visiting the Moscow Kremlin, the Tretyakov Gallery, the Pushkin Fine Arts Museum, or a boat trip along the Moskva River... perhaps locate some tickets for ballet, opera, circus or a concert this evening? As well as famous classical music traditions Moscow features on the touring schedules of world names in jazz, rock, pop and world music.

Breakfast

Leaving from Moscow to Beijing

DAY 03

Your morning is free until 11:45am when a driver is scheduled to take you to the station. Although there’s a restaurant car service on board your train you may want to supplement this with some snacks, treats, and fresh fruit that you could buy today.

Your transfer from the hotel to Yaroslavl station is scheduled for 11:45am, so please be at the hotel reception where your driver will meet you and will assist your boarding of the Irkutsk bound train.

Breakfast

DAY 04–06

On board The Trans-Sib... travelling towards Irkutsk. The dining car is the heart of social life on the train. It functions as bar, lounge, and take-out snack store, as well as a café serving reasonably priced meals. It is a great place to meet fellow travellers and locals alike, sharing your experiences of your journey so far with a few drinks, which no doubt will include some Vodka – and maybe smoked salmon and caviar too! Along the way you’ll see astonishing Siberian scenery as the deciduous forests of the Ural Mountains slowly give way to Siberian pine forests. The major landmarks are the great rivers you cross, including the River Ob at Novosibirsk (one of the most famous bridges on the route), and the gigantic Enisei River (at Krasnoyarsk).

No meals

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DAY 07

Early morning arrival in Irkutsk. Our driver will meet you at the end of the platform, holding a meeting-board marked with your name. Transfer to “U Ozero” 3★ Hotel. (The name translates as “At the Lake Hotel”, although it is not directly at the lake shore) situated in Listvyanka Village (70km) travelling by road through the forest. The facilities available at this hotel include; cafe-bar, Russian “banya” (sauna), safe at the reception. The nearest ATM-machine in the Baikal Hotel (Listvyanka remains a village, and doesn't have the range of banking services you could expect in a city). The official check-in time is 12 noon, the hotel reception will advise you they will need your passport for visa registration formalities. However if your room is available this will - of course - be allocated to you on arrival. (If your room is not available you will be able to leave your luggage with the hotel reception). You will have a chance to have breakfast before setting off on your walking tour around Listvyanka Village. This will include a visit to the Limnological Museum (this is an exhibition about the Lake, its formation, wildlife etc - it includes multimedia presentations, information about the creatures which live in the darkest depths, and also an aquarium with living aquatic species, including the unique freshwater Baikal seals) and also a small wooden village Russian Orthodox Church dating back to the C18th. You return to your hotel at the end of the walk, with time to relax and enjoy your lakeside surroundings, maybe experience real Siberian “banya” (sauna). (small payment locally at the hotel).

Breakfast

DAY 08

Choose one activity from the list, it's all included in the trip price! You'll need to inform us of your choice before commencing your journey, so that we can have the right staff on hand for when you arrive (please note the Siberian weather puts seasonal limits on some activities – details below). Want to extend your life? Local legend claims that you can get anything from five extra years of life (paddling up to your knees) up to twenty years if you manage to go swimming!

A. SIBERIAN TREK through the Taiga Forest with a local guide who will explain the wildlife, eco system and lore of the Taiga. (May-Oct)

B. CIRCUM BAIKAL PICNIC Take the Ferry from Listvyanka to Port Baikal which takes around 15 minutes. Walk around Port Baikal, where you will see the train station of the old Circumbaikal rail line. Then you will walk along the the rail line to the nearest tunnel (2-3 km). Stopping for a picnic lunch on the shore of Lake Baikal. Return to Port Baikal, ferry back to Listvyanka. (Jun-Sep)

C. TALTSY WOODEN MUSEUM A three hour trip which includes a driver, and English speaking guide to the Taltsy open air wooden museum on the shore of Lake Baikal. This picturesque area shows how life was and has been sympathetically restored as a tourist attraction where you can ride Troikas and also buy authentic souvenirs. There is a tea house here also to refresh you after a busy morning sightseeing. (Year round)

E. DO YOUR OWN THING maybe take off on a cliff side walk, or mosey around the village, or take a dip in Lake Baikal! (Weather permitting!)

Balance of day free time to explore the village at your own pace. Maybe try a local bar?

Breakfast

DAY 09

No specific itinerary is planned today. This is a free day at your leisure. Why not take a walk down to the harbour and enjoy the freshly caught omlu, the indigenous fish of Lake Baikal.

Breakfast

DAY 10

After breakfast transfer back to Irkutsk city. Where you will have the option to leave your bags at our local office. You will be given a map and recommendations of interesting places to visit, balance of day free to explore. We suggest you take this opportunity to purchase provisions for the next leg of your journey, as often this service has no dining car. This evening transfer to the station for the Ulaanbaatar bound train.

Breakfast

DAY 11

On board heading down towards Mongolia. At midnight you will make the border crossing into Mongolia with the usual halt for formalities.

No meals

DAY 12

Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, and straight to the Naadam Opening Ceremonies. Naadam kicks off with an opening parade around the track of the Sports Stadium, vaguely similar to the Olympics Parade but with a special Mongolian twist. In addition to all the competitors, the Parade includes all the past & present Miss Mongolias, famous singers, actors and musicians, rock bands, a motorbike enthusiasts group, various carnival floats, masked shamanic dancers, and various celebrities and politicians. Once Naadam has been officially opened, the wrestling bouts began right there at the Stadium – the rounds will take three days to complete! In the adjacent stadiums there are archery and ankle-bone flicking contests to watch, and all around the stadium area an impromptu fair of souvenir-stands, fast food and attractions takes place. Watch out for pickpockets! Evening transfer to the Elstei Ger Lodge, one hour's drive from Ulaanbaatar, and supper.

Breakfast, Boxed Lunch, Supper

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DAY 13

Breakfast at Elstei. Transfer to Ulaanbaatar to the ankle-bone and archery tournaments. Afternoon transfer out of Ulaanbaatar to the horse-track, to see the rounds in the horse-riding championships. Evening transfer back to Elstei for supper and overnight in traditional Mongolian ger tents.

Breakfast, Boxed Lunch, Supper

DAY 14

Mini-Naadam. This is a special version of Naadam which the Mongolian horse-trainers have set up and run for themselves - "trying to restore and preserve lost traditions". The accent is on horse events (and also any other four-legged friends, such as camels and even yaks) but there are usually a mixture of other events too. Afternoon – there is a display of Mongolian national traditional events on the City Square, to which transport is included. Return transfer from Elstei Ger Lodge is included.

Breakfast, Boxed Lunch,, Supper

DAY 15

A complete rest & relaxation day at Elstei. You can go horse-riding yourself with local trainers, take a walk in the beautiful surrounding area, wander over to see the giant Genghis Khan statue, practice Mongolian archery – or just stretch out for a read or a nap in the glorious summer weather.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 16

Depart from Elstei to the Gobi. The Gobi is a huge area – we are heading particularly for Bayan Unjuul, an area of outstanding natural beauty (200 km by road). Along the way we'll stop to see wildlife and landscape views. Overnight in a ger camp in the Gobi area.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 17

Visit to the Zorgol Khaikhan mountain (Gobi area). This is a large mountain of granite rocks – home to large numbers of wild sheep and goats. Overnight at a ger camp.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 18

Time to relax and enjoy the surroundings of the Bayan Unjuul Ger Camp.

Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

DAY 19

Transfer to Ulaanbaatar by road, and a free day to explore the main attractions of the city – including the famous Gandan Monastery, the largest and most holy site in Mongolian Buddhist culture. There are other museums to visit, along with shops, cafes, internet cafes, or even have some authentically greasy buuziy (Mongolian stuffed dumplings) at a stand-up cafe. Evening and overnight at the Bayangol Hotel, right in the centre of town.

Breakfast

DAY 20

Early morning transfer to the station for the Beijing bound train. Time to leave the Capital On The Steppes – today's train journey meanders through amazing sun parched scenery of the Southern Gobi. Later that evening there comes the Chinese border formalities, after which you are free to get some sleep.

Breakfast

DAY 21

Don't oversleep today, as it's possibly some of the most spectacular scenery of the entire route, as you leave the desert scenery behind and pass by mountains and rice paddy fields. Afternoon arrival to Beijing Central Station. For services in China and beyond please refer to our web site.

No meals