



# Trans Mongolian Railway • 21 days

## - Discovery

Beijing to St.Petersburg

- China, Mongolia, Russia

See and experience China's "Imperial City", then travel aboard the Trans Mongolian Express, beyond the Great Wall and across the fringes of the Gobi Desert to the grasslands of Mongolia. And so to Lake Baikal and aboard the great Trans Siberian Railway to Moscow and St.Petersburg, Russia's two most exciting cities. Explore Red Square, St Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin then north to the magnificent 18th century buildings and palaces of St.Petersburg. A fantastic adventure across Asia in just three weeks.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ The change in landscapes and cultures as we move from Asia to European Russia.
- ▶ The experience of staying in a traditional ger (felt tent) on the vast Mongolian steppe.
- ▶ Eating traditional Siberian cuisine on the shores of Lake Baikal, the world's largest fresh-water lake.
- ▶ Exploring the surprisingly beautiful cities of Moscow and St.Petersburg.
- ▶ Meeting local people as they travel on the train for business and pleasure.

### TRAVELSTYLE

This is a Discovery journey. The Discovery travelstyle is our benchmark journey. They are great value and use 3 star hotels, comfortable guesthouses and gers (the traditional home of nomads across Central Asia) when travelling in Mongolia and Central Asia. There is plenty of time to experience local life and enjoy the sights each city has to offer. Discovery journeys offer an easy pace and suit just about any age. Sundowners Group Leaders and local guides accompany these journeys and sightseeing and some meals are included.

### Fitness Guidelines

In order to participate fully in this journey you will need average level of fitness. A typical day will include sightseeing of up to 4 hours of combined bus/walking, including some steps, uneven surfaces and infrequent short rests with access to basic bathroom facilities. During 'free time' you have the option to join in unscheduled group activities explore independently or rest, and most itineraries include some optional evening activities also. Travellers generally find their days are full and fairly long. In hotels, accommodation will usually include elevator (lift) access to rooms on upper floors, but this cannot be guaranteed. Discovery journeys do not include portorage, and you should be able to carry your complete belongings (unaided) for walks of up to 10 minutes (for example, through railway stations with several flights of stairs, or to some rooms in larger hotels).

### LOCAL PAYMENT

There is no Local Payment applicable to this journey, however please see notes under 'Tipping'.

### GROUP SIZE & GROUP LEADER

15 maximum, plus Group Leader. Every Sundowners group is accompanied by a Group Leader, chosen for their experience, personal qualities and passion for our style of travel. Supported by our operations team and local offices, they take care of all the transport, accommodation and paperwork necessary to ensure a smooth running trip. They are not a tour guide but instead a combination of organiser, negotiator and bureaucracy battler - and their sheer enthusiasm, energy and spirit are your guarantee of an unforgettable travel experience. Our Group Leaders are a mixture of local specialists and western adventurers, and all have an absolute passion for the destinations in which they work!

### EXPERIENCE IN THE REGION

Sundowners ran its first journey in 1973 and have continued to offer exciting travel experiences ever since. Every Sundowners staff member has travelled the Trans Siberian / Mongolian route either from personal experience, staff training or as a group leader. Our Trans Siberian / Mongolian experience is unquestioned, and 2003 marked our 30th anniversary of this epic journey.

# ITINERARY

## Day 1-3. Beijing

---

Beijing will prove unforgettable, all senses assailed - colour and sound, smell and taste - leaving indelible memories of continual contrast, history and tradition alongside 20th century technology. Over our three days here the 'Scheduled Sightseeing' will begin with some of the city's greatest highlights, the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square and of course 'The Wall' stretching 10,000 Li across the distant hills.

## Day 4. Trans Mongolian Railway

---

At last to Beijing Station and aboard the first of the trains that will carry us across Asia. We're off! Following the Great Wall northwest towards Mongolia. We settle in to our comfortable compartments and watch from the window as the towns and villages and the scenes of local life of Inner Mongolia go by. In the evening we settle down to our first night aboard as we cross the Gobi Desert.

## Day 5. Ulaanbaatar

---

Bounded by Lake Baikal to the north and the Great Wall to the south is the Mongolian Plateau and Gobi Desert. This was the homeland of the brilliant, tough, well-drilled horsemen who, for over 500 years from the 13th century, plundered and occupied lands and cities from the Yellow River to the Danube. At daybreak, classic scenes of traditional nomadic life greet us as the train winds impressively across the Mongolian Steppe and into the capital. Ulaanbaatar, is a contradiction - a metropolis amid endless grass steppes, concrete apartment blocks and traditional gers.

## Days 6-8. Ulaanbaatar and the Mongolian Steppe

---

After breakfast we visit the Zaisan Memorial from which the entire city is visible. Also to the country's largest remaining monastery, Gandan Hiid where you can mingle with Buddhist monks. In the afternoon we travel out across the grasslands through the countryside where we spend two nights in a traditional Mongolian nomad ger set amongst spectacular rock formations and wild rolling hills. Among nomadic families and their grazing livestock we can explore nearby valleys or just relax and enjoy the area. We return to Ulaanbaatar and visit the National Museum before joining the train north to Siberia.

## Day 9. Aboard the Trans Mongolian Railway

---

Continuing towards Russia, leaving Mongolia at Sukhe Bator and travelling beyond the Russian border town to Ulan Ude, then west along the southern shore of the world's deepest freshwater lake - Baikal.

## Day 10. Irkutsk (Siberia)

---

Almost in the centre of Asia, Irkutsk - 18th century churches, bright painted shutters and log houses decorated with wooden lacework. Modern administrative blocks and soaring bridges reach out across the Angara River in this beautiful town known as the "Paris of Siberia". On our walking tour you will discover the city's wonderful historic sights.

## Day 11. Lake Baikal (Siberia)

---

We also enjoy a full day at Lake Baikal and time to visit the village of Listvyanka with its traditional houses and beautiful wooden church and nearby Limnological Museum. To gain an insight into the traditional lives of Siberian people we also visit the Museum of Wooden Architecture.

## Days 12-14. Aboard the Trans Siberian Railway

---

We join the Trans Siberian Railway and travel via Novosibirsk, Omsk and Ekaterinburg booming over the steel bridges spanning Siberia's nerve system of 5,000 rivers. Through the Ural Mountains and, on the far side of the Volga, the flickering silvers and greens of the birch forests speed past. On past its suburbs and into the heart of Moscow the train arrives almost casually on time.

## Days 15-18. Moscow

---

Moscow will amaze you, its palaces and public buildings restored to their former glory. The echoing vastness of Red Square, the splendid twirled cupolas of St. Basil's across the cobblestones, and the Kremlin itself - that fabled palace-fort of gilded domes where we marvel at the exquisite collection of royal treasures in the stunning Armoury Chamber. We ride the palatial underground rail system, adorned with chandeliers, mosaics and baroque bas-relief and perhaps a river cruise or a magical evening at one of Moscow's great theatres or State Circus. Our last rail journey is aboard the overnight express to St. Petersburg.

## Days 19-20. St.Petersburg

---

It is the city on the water, the "Venice of the North", standing resplendent on the delta of the Neva River. St Isaac's Cathedral, richly filled palaces and museums, wide boulevards and canals. The gilded halls of the Hermitage Museum hung with the works of Da Vinci, Rembrandt and many other great masters, and beyond the city lie the incomparable summer palaces of the tsars at Petrodvorets. Yet for all this, St.Petersburg remains one of Europe's best kept secrets.

## Day 21. Depart St.Petersburg

---

The last day has arrived too soon. The adventure is complete, the legendary rail journey that started many days ago has taken you across Asia, through lands and cultures literally worlds apart.

## SUMMARY ITINERARY - BEIJING TO ST PETERSBURG

---

Day 1	Beijing / Hotel / No meals
Day 2	Beijing / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 3	Beijing / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 4	Morning departure to Ulaanbaatar / Train / No meals
Day 5	Afternoon arrival Ulaanbaatar / Hotel / No meals
Day 6	Ulaanbaatar and Terej / Ger / Breakfast
Day 7	Terej / Ger / Breakfast
Day 8	Ulaanbaatar and late departure to Irkutsk / Train / Breakfast
Day 9	Trans-Mongolian / Train / No meals
Day 10	Morning arrival Irkutsk / Hotel / No meals
Day 11	Lake Baikal and Irkutsk / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 12	Afternoon departure to Moscow / Train / Breakfast
Day 13	Trans-Siberian / Train / No meals
Day 14	Trans-Siberian / Train / No meals
Day 15	Afternoon arrival Moscow / Hotel / No meals
Day 16	Moscow / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 17	Moscow / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 18	Moscow and late departure to St Petersburg / Train / Breakfast
Day 19	Morning arrival in St Petersburg / Hotel / No meals
Day 20	St Petersburg / Hotel / Breakfast
Day 21	St Petersburg / No accommodation / Breakfast

## SCHEDULED SIGHTSEEING

---

Scheduled Sightseeing is part of the itinerary and includes all transport, entrance fees and English speaking local guide

- ▶ Beijing: City tour including Tiananmen Square & Temple of Heaven, Great Wall.
- ▶ Ulaanbaatar: Zaisan Memorial, National History Museum, Gandan Hiid Monastery, Terej National Park.
- ▶ Irkutsk (Siberia): Walking tour of city, Museum of Wooden Architecture, Limnological Museum, Lake Baikal and Listvyanka village.
- ▶ Moscow: City tour, St.Basil's Cathedral, Red Square, Kremlin and Armoury Chamber.
- ▶ St.Petersburg: City tour, Palace Square, Hermitage Museum.

## CITY EXPLORING

---

City Exploring is optional sightseeing outside the itinerary guideline with the Group Leader. It is designed to be flexible, may change depending on group wishes and the time available, and is at the discretion of the leader. Travellers will be asked to share the transport cost, if required, and provide their own entrance fees.

Our Group Leaders know the 'off-the-beaten-track' sights and can make suggestions on the best places to explore, eat and relax. By combining Scheduled Sightseeing with City Exploring, they aim to share not only the 'must-sees' of each destination, but to introduce the more personal and idiosyncratic aspects they have discovered themselves. We use local taxis, public transport, underground metro and go on foot - it's about getting involved with everyday life, and local people!

## Some City Exploring activities in the past have included:

---

- ▶ Beijing: Hutong backstreets tour, acrobatics show, early morning Tai Chi in the parks.
- ▶ Ulaanbaatar: visiting nomad families in Terej National Park, local performances of traditional music and dance.
- ▶ Irkutsk: fishing at Listvyanka village, picnic on the shores of Lake Baikal, nightclubbing in Irkutsk.
- ▶ Moscow: tour of the stunning Metro stations, boat cruise on the Moskva river, busking in Arbat Street.
- ▶ St Petersburg: Cossack dancing, Russian Museum, Neva cruise to Summer Palace (Petrodvorets) gardens.

## **Optional Activities**

---

Please note that City Exploring and any activities you participate in outside the specified itinerary and scheduled sightseeing are at your own risk. While your Group Leader will be happy to assist you in pursuing other activities and interests, Sundowners makes no claims as to the safety of the activity, nor the standard of the local parties operating it. Your Group Leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the specified itinerary if it is felt to be unsafe. Although opportunities may be provided locally, Sundowners recommends that travellers do not ride local animals.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

---

### **Hotels - 11 nights (twin share).**

---

We have chosen hotels of a standard we consider appropriate to the 'Discovery' Travelstyle. Hotel accommodation is based on a twin share unless you have requested and paid for sole use of a room and all rooms have private bathroom facilities. Hotels are chosen for the best available combination of location, comfort and facilities, but please be aware that in the destinations you are visiting, the choice of hotels in this category is very limited.

### **Single Supplement Option**

---

For clients who would like sole use of a room, a single supplement is available for a single additional payment. Please note that supplement only applies to hotel nights (not including dayrooms where applicable), and is not available for ger or train nights.

### **Traditional Mongolian Ger - 2 nights (shared)**

---

The Ger experience is a highlight for many people, and certainly a wonderful opportunity to see the traditional way of life for Mongolians. Our ger camps are comfortable, clean and fully furnished (including linen and blankets), however bathroom facilities are provided separately. Depending on group size and ger availability, you will be sharing a ger up to a maximum of four people.

### **Trains - 7 nights (4 berth)**

---

Overnight accommodation in trains is in four-share sleeping compartments, unless you have paid the supplement for 2-berth rail option – see notes on Trains in General Info section below.

### **2 Berth Rail Option**

---

This option is available for all rail sectors on this journey, for a supplementary price when two people book and travel together. We regret that we are unable to offer 2-berth rail to single travellers, nor are we able to pair single travellers together for this purpose. Most 2-berth compartments are of a slightly higher standard than 4-berth compartments, however as the rail authorities only assign 2-berth compartments 30 days prior to travel, it is impossible for us to confirm them any further in advance. By opting to pay the 2 berth rail supplement, we are not guaranteeing an upgrade in the standard of your compartment, you are simply paying to secure the sole use of a train compartment for 2 passengers (this may mean using a 4-berth compartment for two travellers). If the standard of the trains is of particular importance to you, we would recommend that you consider one of our Premium journeys which use private chartered trains instead of the scheduled public services.

## GENERAL INFORMATION - FOR TRANS-MONGOLIAN TRAVELLERS

### BEFORE YOU GO...

#### VOUCHERS & GROUP JOINING INFORMATION

With your final documents from Sundowners, you will receive vouchers for your Small Group Journey, 2-Berth Rail or Single Supplements (when booked and paid in advance), and any pre or post-tour arrangements you have made with us. These are your 'tickets' and your Group Leader or our local agents will collect them when needed. Please check these vouchers carefully when you receive them, and do not hesitate to contact your travel agent or Sundowners if you have any questions regarding your arrangements. You will also receive information regarding your joining hotel and how to find it, as well as emergency contact details for our local operators. Please refer to separate document 'Joining Instructions' (provided with your final documents) for the details of your group hotel and local contacts.

#### TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION & VISAS

##### Visas and Sundowners Assistance

Required for China, Mongolia & Russia - Sundowners will provide all required invitation letters. Full visa support including detailed visa guidelines will be included with your booking confirmation.

Upon entering Russia, you will need to complete an Arrival/Departure card. It is important that you fill in both the arrival and departure sections. Immigration officials will return the departure section, and this **MUST** be kept with your passport at all times. Registration stamps are collected on the back of this form, and need to be presented when checking in to hotels and exiting the country.

In Russia you are required to pay a visa registration fee when you check in at hotels - your Group Leader will advise you of any charges that are applicable, and the fee can vary from US\$1-\$5 per person, per hotel. If you are beginning your group journey in Russia, you will need to pay the first fee directly to the hotel when you arrive.

##### Your Responsibilities

You must ensure that you are in possession of a passport (with at least six months validity from the date you complete your Sundowners arrangements), and any visas necessary to enter or transit any countries involved in the journey. You must also ensure that you have the necessary visas for any travelling you plan to do immediately before or after your Sundowners arrangements. Please note that there is little time or opportunity to obtain visas for onward travel during your Trans-Mongolian journey, and you should seek Sundowners' advice if you think this will be necessary.

##### Customs Declaration

To avoid problems on exiting Russia and Mongolia, Sundowners strongly recommend that you obtain a customs declaration form and that you declare the currency that you are bringing into each country. This form should be stamped by a Customs Official and kept safe until departure. Sundowners also recommends that you retain any currency exchange certificates and bank withdrawal receipts to produce on departure as these are sometimes requested in addition to customs declaration forms.

#### HEALTH

The pace of these tours can be tiring due to factors such as change of diet, change of environment, high and low temperatures, distances travelled, basic facilities and busy days. You should be in good health to satisfactorily participate in this tour. There is a considerable amount of walking (for example sightseeing tours of several hours without return to the hotel), steps and uneven paths to sites of interest and climbing on and off trains (with very few stations having raised platforms). You may be allocated an upper berth on the train. These are reached by a small ladder on Russian trains, and a single step (approx. 1m above the ground) on Chinese trains.

Please advise Sundowners of any pre-existing medical conditions which may prohibit your full participation. We recommend that you have a general medical and dental check-up before departure and that all clients consider the rigors of their journey, their personal ability and comfort levels. Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss the nature of your journey and any concerns prior to booking or departure.

---

## FIRST AID

---

Medication and other items are widely available in larger cities. However, as the quality may not be as high as products from home, it may be useful to bring a supply of basic items with you. A first-aid kit may include band-aids, antiseptic, aspirin, cough medicine, throat lozenges, cold and flu medication, diarrhoea medication, mild laxative, eye ointments/drops for minor infections, a general antibiotic and any special medications you may need personally.

If you are taking special medication, it is a good idea to carry a letter from your doctor to show authorities if necessary. Since some medications can also be affected by changes in temperature or require special care, we recommend you discuss this with your doctor before departure.

---

## Vaccinations

---

While there are no compulsory vaccinations required for entry into these countries, we do recommend that you contact your doctor or a recognised travel health specialist for up-to-date advice.

---

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

---

Travel Insurance is compulsory for all Sundowners Small Group Journeys. You must ensure that your insurance policy covers you for the entire duration of your journey, and that you have purchased the highest level of cover available to you for medical emergencies (including repatriation/evacuation cover) which is relevant to ALL the destinations that you will be visiting. Please bring a copy of your policy, as your Group Leader will check insurance details at the Pre Departure Meeting on Day 1 of the journey. You will not be permitted to join group arrangements until the Group Leader has seen evidence of comprehensive insurance cover. For passengers wishing to use insurance provided by credit cards it will be necessary for you to complete a "Credit Card Insurance Details" form prior to joining your Sundowners journey for this insurance to be accepted. Please contact Sundowners for further information.

---

## LUGGAGE & PACKING

---

---

### Luggage

---

**\*Each year a number of our clients find the enjoyment of their journey lessened by the bulk and weight of their luggage. We cannot stress enough that you should only bring what you can comfortably carry unassisted!\***

You will be required to carry your own luggage - for example on or off the trains, through the stations (up to 10 minutes walk including several flights of stairs and uneven surfaces) and from the bus into the hotel. We recommend using a single rucksack or soft bag as your main luggage for this journey - these fit more easily into the limited luggage space on the trains. We also recommend that you carry a small daypack for personal items used during the day (camera, water, snacks etc.) and a hidden money belt for carrying valuables. A good test after you have packed is to try carrying your bags (including all daypacks, jackets and camera cases!) for at least 200m, and try to include a set of steps too. If you have any difficulty, we would recommend a re-pack! Porterage is not available at all stations or hotels – availability is unpredictable and should not be relied upon. You should not expect the Group Leader or other group members to assist you with your baggage.

---

### SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

---

A packing list will vary greatly depending on season, overall duration/destinations of travel, and of course personal experience and preference. It is impossible for Sundowners to provide the 'perfect packing list' and so we prefer to direct you towards guidebooks and the internet so that you may research this yourself and decide what is appropriate. The temperature chart provided shows average temperatures and should give you an indication of what to expect. It is important that you do your own research on expected minimum and maximum temperatures as this will affect what you pack. Since this journey covers a huge area and varying terrain you may encounter a range of temperatures and weather conditions, and we would recommend that you bring layers of lighter clothing to allow for changes in temperature along the route. The following items are things that we feel are well worth considering

- ▶ money belt
- ▶ comfortable walking shoes or boots
- ▶ medical kit (see notes under health)
- ▶ small torch/flashlight
- ▶ sweater/fleece
- ▶ thermal underwear (Oct-May departures)
- ▶ waterproof & windproof jacket
- ▶ sandals / slip-on shoes (for the train and summer months)
- ▶ casual lightweight clothes for train
- ▶ hat/sun block/lip balm/sunglasses
- ▶ toiletries (if you have preferred brands – most essentials are available en-route)
- ▶ toilet paper/moistened tissues (eg Wet Ones)

- ▶ alarm clock

Some of our travelers have found the following items useful

- ▶ heat-proof mug with lid
- ▶ spoon/fork
- ▶ pocket-knife (pack in main luggage for flights)
- ▶ a nice outfit for Moscow and St Petersburg evenings
- ▶ universal sink plug
- ▶ washing line and travel wash
- ▶ small travel towel

## WHILE YOU ARE TRAVELLING...

### CONTACT

#### Hotel Lists and Details

Since the accommodation we are using can vary according to season, availability and group size, we regret that we are unable to provide hotel lists for our journeys. We also find that the nature of our destinations is such that the contact information is often unreliable, and quickly outdated. Where it is possible to get through to a hotel, our experience is that there are often language barriers, and faxes and messages may not reach guests. Please note that the hotels listed on your visa invitation are subject to change and should not be considered a 'de facto' hotel list.

#### Phone, Fax and Internet

Since the hotels are not a reliable point of contact, we strongly recommend that you establish an e-mail address before you leave home that can be used whilst travelling. There are a number of well-known free e-mail providers such as 'hotmail' and 'yahoo', and many smaller providers who can also offer this service. Internet access is readily available in all our destination cities; and your Group Leader will be happy to assist you along the way. Prices start at less than US\$1 per hour in Ulaanbaatar, US\$2-3 per hour in Beijing hotels, or US\$0.50 in local internet cafes, and US\$2 per hour in Russia. Internet security is an issue in these countries, and we advise against using Internet Banking facilities whilst travelling.

Phone and fax can be accessed in hotels, phone centres and some internet cafes. International call centres in Beijing and Ulaanbaatar are cheap however the quality and reliability of some phone lines can be below the necessary standard. Cheap phone cards are an option and are available in many call centers and internet cafes. Hotel phone, fax and internet tend to be disproportionately expensive.

#### In an Emergency

We do understand that there are some circumstances where people may need to contact you urgently. In this instance, please ask family or friends to contact the Sundowners office in Melbourne, where they will either be able to speak to a staff member, or note the 24-hour emergency contact number from our after-hours message service. Our Operations team will be able to locate and contact the group as quickly as possible, as well as provide accurate information to those at home. Please phone: + 61 3 9672 5300.

### MEALS AND FOOD

This journey covers an amazing range of cultures and landscapes, and the food available en-route reflects this diversity. From China's diverse regional dishes, Mongolia's nomadic cooking heritage, the hearty meals of Siberia and the food of Tsars in St Petersburg, the local cuisine will be an unforgettable experience. There is a list of the included meals for your trip in the 'Summary Itinerary' - all other meals are at your own expense. Where meals are not included your Group Leader will recommend options for all budgets and taste, and provide opportunities to eat at traditional local restaurants.

You should budget US\$5-8 in China for everyday meals, and have some money aside for special occasions such as 'Peking Duck' US\$10, local beers US\$0.20-US\$3 and tea houses. If you are willing to try some buuz (mutton dumplings), and the local Chinggis Khan beer – budget around US\$10 per day for Ulaanbaatar. To eat at the more upmarket restaurants you will need US\$20 per day. Food at the Ger camps is around US\$4 per meal.

Siberia is still cheap, and a hearty meal of borsch, goulash, potato puree and Siberian salad will cost you US\$6-\$8. Moscow and St Petersburg are on a par with the most expensive cities of Europe, and although there are some cheap eating options (blinis and baked potatoes on the street, western fast food chains and all-you-can-eat restaurants), a restaurant meal will cost between US\$10 and US\$35.

On board the trains, the restaurant staff will point out which menu items are available – there is usually a vegetarian option. Chinese and Mongolian trains serve standard local fare, including rice, vegetables, chicken and mutton. Russian trains serve hearty meals, usually including soup, salad and meat mains. On some of the shorter journeys a dining car may not be available – your Group Leader will advise if this is the case and assist with making alternative arrangements for meals. We do not include meals on train sectors so that individuals can choose the size and schedule of their meals. Many people prefer to prepare picnics in their compartment – often sharing local delicacies with fellow travellers – as the routine of life on-board is very informal.

There are many street stalls and small kiosks to purchase drinks and snacks. Large markets and bazaars have a wide range of fruit, vegetables, bread, meats and other foods. Your Group Leader and local guides will point out regional specialties along the route.

Tea is the most common drink en-route, with black tea popular among the Russians (usually with jam or sweets), and green tea dominant in China. Mongolian tea is a highlight – a mixture of milk, black tea and salt! Bottled water is readily available – although sparkling water is more common in Russia. Wine is available for those with a sweet tooth. Dry wine tends to be an expensive import item. Beer is widely available, and often cheaper than water. We would recommend you allow an average of USD \$15.00 - \$20.00 for meals on this journey. You may wish to budget extra if you are particularly fond of the best Russian cuisine, or particularly apprehensive about mutton!

### **Special Dietary Requirements & General Health**

---

Please note that the selection and variety of foods in China and Russia is reasonable, but in Russia and Mongolia the meals are usually meat-based. Vegetarianism is not something locals are familiar with, and vegetarian meals along this route (especially Mongolia and Siberia) lack variety and are not richly flavoured. It is harder for vegetarians to get a balanced and varied diet. If you have food allergies or preferences please let your Group Leader know, and they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee that special requirements can always be met, and we recommend you bring a small supply of food from home to supplement your diet if you have special dietary requirements.

Observing simple precautions such as peeling fruit, avoiding uncooked or reheated food and using only bottled or boiled water will minimise stomach upsets. Bottled water is widely available and recommended for drinking and also brushing teeth.

### **TRAINS**

---

Overnight accommodation in trains is in four-share sleeping compartments, unless you have paid the supplement for 2-berth rail option. You may be sharing with other group members, or with local travellers. These are not chartered trains but scheduled services that allow you to see the passing parade of local life unhindered by tourist influences. There is a variety of rolling stock on this route and the standard of train compartments is dependent on available wagons and the enthusiasm of our two attendants (conductors). There are no shower facilities on any of the trains we use, however it is possible to have a strip wash in the bathrooms.

Train carriages usually have 9 compartments, and a separate living quarters for attendants (2 per carriage). Compartments have 4 comfortable bunks with a basic mattress, a small table under the window, personal reading lamps and clean linen. Power outlets are located in the bathrooms and hallway, however it is not usually permitted or advisable to use these outlets. Smoking is permitted in the transit areas between each carriage. There are some small differences between the Chinese and Russian carriages.

Chinese rolling stock is being upgraded on the most popular routes with new carriages being used between Xian and Beijing. The upper berth bunks are reached by a small step approximately 1m from the floor. Luggage space is very limited as the lower bunks do not lift up and only medium sized suitcases and soft-packs will fit in the overhead luggage compartment. Chinese trains usually have a squat style toilet with a small basin at either end of the carriage. Some carriages have a western style toilet at one end and a separate communal washroom.

Russian and Mongolian carriages have a samovar (for hot water) at one end of the wagon, and two western style toilets with a small wash basin. There is ample room for luggage under the lower bunks and in an overhead compartment. Russian commuters like to be warm and there are some cultural differences as to what constitutes a draft or fresh air. The more modern carriages have air-conditioning which means it is not possible to open windows. Older carriages have a fan and the attendant can open windows upon request.

Borders are an integral part of our journey – patience, a sense of humor, and a positive outlook will ensure you enjoy this experience. Border crossings take a long time due to customs and immigration searching trains – often full of traders – bogey changes (an amazing sight at the China/Mongolia border), and train schedules. Your Group Leader will assist you with the paperwork and specific timings of the crossing.

---

## DAILY LIVING

---

### Daily expenses

---

As a guideline we recommend that you budget an average of USD \$15.00 - \$20.00 per day over and above meal costs for day to day expenses. If you are an avid souvenir collector or have a particular indulgence, you may need to increase this amount. Entrance fees will be paid locally for additional sightseeing – see the Scheduled Sightseeing for exact inclusions. Most additional sightseeing is relatively inexpensive, however some performances in Moscow and St Petersburg can cost up to US\$80.

### Laundry

---

Laundry service is available at most hotels along the route. Some hotels in Russia do not provide laundry facilities, however it is usually possible to have your floor attendant wash your clothes for a small fee. Your Group Leader will advise you of available facilities when the group checks in to each hotel. It is advisable to bring some biodegradable laundry soap, a universal bath plug and a small washing line if you wish to hand wash – most hotels do not provide plugs or clothes lines. Laundry costs an average of US\$2-\$3 per item.

### Tipping

---

Across Asia, people have become accustomed to the new freedoms and opportunities of a capitalist economy. Tipping has become an essential (and expected) supplement for those working with foreign tourists, eg: drivers, guides and porters. We have found from experience that it is convenient for the Group Leader or an elected group member to collect a kitty and administer it according to the group's decision. A tip kitty saves the need for regular use of small denomination bills. Your contribution to the tip kitty will be collected by you Group Leader at the Pre-Departure Meeting on Day 1 of the Journey. Smaller denominations are appreciated. Amounts below are per person, per itinerary:

- ▶ Trans Mongolian Discovery US\$60
- ▶ Trans Mongolian Cultural US\$90
- ▶ Trans Mongolian Challenging US\$100

### Commissions

---

To ensure services are provided in the best interests of our clients, Sundowners operates a no commission policy. Group Leaders do not rely on commissions or tips for salary – they are paid industry-leading wages and have their expenses covered while travelling. If you feel your Group Leader has done a fantastic job, and wish to pass on a gratuity, please feel free to do so.

### Personal Spending Money

---

(Please also see notes under individual headings)

We recommend you allow an average USD \$15.00 - \$20.00 per day for meals and food.

We recommend that you budget an average of USD \$15.00 - \$20.00 per day for daily expenses.

Please also budget for tipping kitty, souvenirs, and additional cultural performances.

---

## CURRENCY

---

Due to potential difficulties in accessing funds whilst travelling, we recommend that you bring as much cash as you feel comfortable carrying, and have the remainder available by credit card.

The monetary unit in China is the Renminbi (approx. 8.2 = 1USD), also known as Yuan, and more colloquially as 'Quai'. In Mongolia you will use a combination of the local Tugrik (approx. 1100 = 1USD) and USD for larger purchases. In Russia the monetary unit is the Rouble (approx. 29 = 1USD). Please check the current Foreign Exchange Rates before travel.

Please note that you must declare any foreign currency on the Customs Declaration (Mongolia and Russia). The black market no longer exists in its old form and banks, change offices, and even hotels now offer similar exchange rates. To change local currency back into USD you will need your passport, currency exchange certificates and in China – a copy of your departure ticket. To avoid being stuck at the border with large amounts of local currency – where it is only sometimes possible to change money at a poor rate - we recommend you change small amounts of money regularly. Your group leader will be able to assist with daily budgets, and best options for changing cash.

## Cash

---

Foreign currency is easily exchanged in hotels, banks and money changing offices. The USD is the most recognised and accepted of all foreign currencies. It is important that you obtain USD notes in good condition (not torn or too worn, with no stamps, ink or other marks) and issued after 1996 as older or damaged USD notes are not accepted. Smaller denominations are less frequently needed now, and we would recommend you carry a mixture of \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills. Please see note above regarding Customs Declarations.

## Travellers Cheques

---

Travellers Cheques are generally not accepted at most banks and hotels along this route. Although it is possible to cash Travellers Cheques at selected banks and money changing offices, the process is very time-consuming and inconvenient. If you must use Travellers Cheques, ensure they are well-known brands such as Thomas Cook or American Express and preferably in US Dollars. Please be aware that between 3% and 10% commission may be charged.

## Credit Cards

---

'VISA' and 'Mastercard' are usually accepted for purchases in large hotels and shops in Moscow, St Petersburg and Beijing, but are generally not accepted in Mongolia or Siberia. Cash advances can be obtained from most banks and bank machines (ATMs) situated throughout China and Russia using 'VISA' and 'Mastercard'. There are 'VISA' card bank machines in Ulaanbaatar, and it is possible to withdraw local currency or USD at major banks using 'Mastercard'. Please note that bank machines in China, Mongolia and Russia only accept 4 digit PIN codes. A very limited number of bank machines are also connected to the Cirrus and Maestro networks – Please contact your card issuer for information regarding using these or your other credit cards in these destinations.

## ENVIRONMENT & CULTURE

---

Sundowners encourages its group leaders, operators and clients to be culturally sensitive and minimise negative impacts on the environment. Working with local operators we invest heavily in locally owned and run companies, employ local guides and national leaders, and offer opportunities for young locals looking to enter the tourism industry through our youth and student brand 'Vodkatrain'.

There are some simple ways you can help us minimise impact on the environment. These measures include minimizing the amount of packaging you bring – as local waste collection services are well below western standards, using biodegradable soap for washing laundry, and collecting rubbish on the train and ensuring it gets placed on station platform bins – and not thrown out the window by well-meaning attendants. This all benefits the environment, and will encourage environmental awareness in local communities.

Respect, an open mind and understanding when dealing with local customs and value systems will enrich your experience and endear you to locals in your interactions. Learning a little of the language, reading as much about the history and culture of the region and observing local conventions in each country is a great way to start! Wearing appropriate clothing to religious sites, and on the street, avoiding expensive jewellery (which emphasises the wealth 'gap' between you and your hosts), using restaurants that are family owned and will have a flow on benefit for the local community, and never participating in activities that support crime organisations such as prostitution and black market currency exchange are just a few ways you can ensure our trips have a positive impact on local communities.

To fully enjoy this experience, avoid judging other cultures by western standards and assumptions.

**We are not here to judge, but to observe and understand.**

## GROUP BEHAVIOUR

---

Travelling in a group may require some compromise to accommodate the different desires and abilities of group members. A willingness to be involved, a positive and flexible approach to travel, understanding the particular demands of the journey and behaviour that is conducive to good group dynamics will ensure your enjoyment on one of the most satisfying and rewarding travel experiences of your life. Please see notes under 'Reasonable Behaviour' in the booking conditions.

## FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY

---

### Cameras & Videos

---

As film is often expensive, old or unobtainable en route, it is preferable to take all you will need from home, or purchase from Duty Free shops en route. A lead-lined film bag is useful for protecting film from security x-ray machines. While video cameras may be recharged in hotels we recommend bringing spare batteries for the train journeys to avoid disappointment.

## Fees

---

Please be aware that there are fees for the use of cameras and videos at some sites visited. Costs vary, but as a guide you can expect to pay US\$1-\$5 for a still camera and US\$5 up to US\$30 for a video camera.

## Sensitivity

---

When photographing local people please respect their privacy. Many are happy to be photographed (some will expect payment), but many prefer not to be the subject of your interest. Some subjects may be sensitive and you should not photograph military installations, border crossings or bridges. Consideration should also be given at religious sites or events.

## RECOMMENDED RESEARCH

---

As well as conventional guidebooks, there are many travelogues, novels and websites that give compelling accounts of adventures and personal experiences in these destinations. They convey more inspiring impressions than mere facts and statistics can ever offer, and we recommend that you seek out and compare for yourself those that will appeal to your own interests and match the level of research you wish to undertake before you travel.

As an introduction, we suggest you look at the following titles - although this list should by no means be considered exhaustive or exclusive!

## Guidebooks

---

Trans-Siberian Handbook - Bryn Thomas (6th ed. Trailblazer Guides)  
Trans-Siberian Rail Guide - Robert Strauss & Tamsin Turnbull (4th ed. Compass Star Publications)  
Trans-Siberian Railway; A Classic Overland Route - Simon Richmond & Maria Vorhees (Lonely Planet)

Many publishers now offer guides to China, Beijing, Mongolia, Moscow and St Petersburg - browse a few then mix and match your favourites!

## Travelogues & Novels

---

- ▶ The Big Red Train Ride - Eric Newby
- ▶ Among The Russians - Colin Thubron
- ▶ In Siberia - Colin Thubron
- ▶ The Last Disco in Outer Mongolia - Nick Middleton
- ▶ Trans-Siberia: Inside the Grey Area - Paddy Linehan
- ▶ Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China - Jung Chang
- ▶ Russian literature of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn

# DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT LINE

## What does it cost to.....?

---

### Buy a cup of black coffee

Beijing	USD\$0.50 - \$1
Ulaanbaatar	USD\$0.50 - \$2
Irkutsk	USD\$0.50 - \$2
Moscow	USD\$1 - \$3

### Laundry a pair of jeans

Beijing	USD\$0.50
Ulaanbaatar	USD\$3
Irkutsk	USD\$3
Moscow	USD\$4

### Buy a bottle of local beer

Beijing	USD\$0.30 - \$2.50
Ulaanbaatar	USD\$1 - \$3
Irkutsk	USD\$0.50 - \$2
Moscow	USD\$1 - \$3

### Short journey in a taxi

Beijing	USD\$1 - \$3
Ulaanbaatar	USD\$0.20 - \$1
Irkutsk	USD\$3
Moscow	USD\$5 - \$15

### Use 30 minutes on e-mail

Beijing	USD\$0.50
Ulaanbaatar	USD\$1
Irkutsk	USD\$2
Moscow	USD\$2