



Mongolia

Endless steppe, the Gobi Desert, nomad tents and horses, in the homeland of Genghis Khan and the largest contiguous land empire in history.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Ulaanbaatar

POPULATION

About 3.6 million (end of 2025)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Mongolian, written in the Cyrillic alphabet; as of 2026 the traditional vertical Mongolian script is also used in official documents

CURRENCY

Mongolian tögrög

AREA

About 1.56 million km², the 18th largest country in the world

GOVERNMENT

Republic with an elected president and a parliament called the State Great Khural

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Khüiten Peak in the Altai Mountains, about 4,356 m (older sources give 4,374 m), on the border with China

LONGEST RIVER

The Orkhon, 1,124 km, the longest river entirely within Mongolia

NEIGHBOURS

Only two: Russia and China. At its western tip Kazakhstan is less than 40 km away, but the two countries do not touch

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+976

TIME ZONE

UTC+8 in most of the country, UTC+7 in the far west

A 45-minute trip to Mongolia

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Mongolia together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 209 BC: Modu becomes ruler of the Xiongnu; 1639: Örgöö, the future Ulaanbaatar, is founded; 1992: A new constitution takes effect. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Buuz and Khuushuur. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Sain baina uu?" (Hello, how are you?), "Sain, sain" (Fine, fine), "Amar baina uu?" (Are you at peace?). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/mongolia/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Mongolia and its cities



- Ulaanbaatar (Capital city): Sükhbaatar Square and the Government Palace, Gandan Monastery and its giant golden statue of Avalokiteshvara, The Bogd Khan's Winter Palace
- Erdenet (Orkhon): The huge open-pit copper mine, Green hills and forests of northern Mongolia
- Darkhan (Darkhan-Uul): The Trans-Mongolian Railway, A monument to the morin khuur, the horsehead fiddle
- Choibalsan (Dornod): The Kherlen River, The eastern steppe
- Mörön (Khövsgöl): Gateway to Lake Khövsgöl, The Uushigiin Övör deer stones nearby
- Khovd (Khovd): Gateway to the Mongolian Altai, A mix of Mongol, Kazakh and other peoples of the west
- Ölgii (Bayan-Ölgii): Kazakh eagle hunters and the Golden Eagle Festival, The road to Altai Tavan Bogd National Park
- Kharkhorin (Övörkhangai): Erdene Zuu Monastery, The ruins of Karakorum
- Dalanzadgad (Ömnögov): Gateway to Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, The Flaming Cliffs
- Zamyn-Üüd (Dornogovi): The main border crossing to China, The Trans-Mongolian Railway

A short history of Mongolia

Mongolian history is the story of the steppe: nomad peoples who rose to build great empires, of which the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan was the largest. The events below run from the Xiongnu, more than 2,000 years ago, to the peaceful revolution that brought democracy.

209 BC **Modu becomes ruler of the Xiongnu**

In 209 BC Modu took power over the Xiongnu, a confederation of nomad tribes on the Mongolian plateau. He united the tribes of the steppe into a powerful empire that reached Lake Baikal in the north and the Pamir Mountains in the west, and forced China's Han dynasty to pay tribute.

AD 732 **The Orkhon inscriptions are carved**

In the early 8th century the Göktürks, a Turkic people, set up tall stone memorials in the Orkhon Valley. The inscription for Prince Kul Tigin, raised in 732, is one of the oldest known texts in a Turkic language, carved next to a text in Chinese.

1206 **Temüjin becomes Genghis Khan**

In 1206 a great assembly of Mongol nobles on the Onon River proclaimed Temüjin ruler of all the Mongols, with the title Genghis Khan (Chinggis Khaan in Mongolian). He reorganised the army and made the Mongols a single nation.

1220 **Karakorum is founded**

The city of Karakorum, in the Orkhon Valley, is usually said to have been founded in 1220. Under Genghis Khan's son Ögedei it received walls and a palace in 1235 and became the capital of the empire, visited by envoys, merchants and monks from Europe and Asia.

1227 **Genghis Khan dies**

Genghis Khan died in 1227 during a campaign against the Western Xia kingdom. The place of his grave is still unknown. His sons and grandsons went on to enlarge the Mongol Empire until it stretched from Korea to Eastern Europe.

- 1271** **Kublai Khan founds the Yuan dynasty**
In 1271 Kublai Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, proclaimed the Yuan dynasty and made Dadu, today's Beijing, his capital. By 1279 the Mongols ruled all of China.
- 1368** **The Mongols are driven out of China**
In 1368 the Ming dynasty drove the last Yuan emperor out of Beijing, and the Mongol court retreated to the steppe. In 1372 a Ming army occupied Karakorum.
- 1585** **Erdene Zuu Monastery is founded**
In 1585 Abtai Sain Khan, a ruler of the Khalkha Mongols, founded Erdene Zuu, probably the oldest surviving Buddhist monastery in Mongolia, next to the ruins of Karakorum and partly with its stones. Tibetan Buddhism became the main faith of the Mongols.
- 1639** **Örgöö, the future Ulaanbaatar, is founded**
In 1639 the young Zanabazar was made the spiritual head of the Khalkha Mongols, and his mobile monastery camp, Örgöö, was founded. It moved many times before settling for good in 1778 by the Tuul River, where it grew into today's capital.
- 1691** **The Khalkha Mongols submit to the Qing**
At a meeting at Dolon Nor in 1691 the princes of the Khalkha Mongols accepted the rule of the Qing emperor Kangxi. Khalkha stayed part of the Qing empire for 220 years.
- 1911** **Mongolia declares independence**
As the Qing empire collapsed, Mongolian nobles declared independence on 1 December 1911, and on 29 December the Bogd Khan, the head of Mongolian Buddhism, was enthroned as their monarch.
- 1921** **The People's Revolution**
In 1921 Mongolian revolutionaries led by Damdin Sükhbaatar, with help from the Soviet Red Army, drove foreign troops out of the country. The anniversary, 11 July, is celebrated each year with the Naadam festival.
- 1924** **The Mongolian People's Republic is proclaimed**
After the Bogd Khan died, the Mongolian People's Republic was proclaimed on 26 November 1924, the world's second communist state. The capital, then called Urga, was renamed Ulaanbaatar, 'Red Hero'.

1939

The Battles of Khalkhin Gol

From May to September 1939, Soviet and Mongolian forces fought the Japanese army along the Khalkhin Gol river in eastern Mongolia. The Soviet and Mongolian victory kept Japan from attacking the Soviet Union again during the Second World War.

1990

The peaceful Democratic Revolution

In the winter of 1990, young people gathered in the central square of Ulaanbaatar to demand democracy. The protests stayed peaceful, the communist leadership resigned in March 1990, and the first multi-party elections were held that summer.

1992

A new constitution takes effect

On 12 February 1992 a new democratic constitution came into force. It ended one-party rule, guaranteed freedom of religion, speech and travel, and changed the name of the country simply to Mongolia.

What people eat in Mongolia

Mongolian food was shaped by a hard climate and the life of herders. Meat, mostly mutton and beef but also goat, horse and camel, is eaten through the long winter, and in summer families live largely on dairy foods, often called 'white foods': clotted cream, dried curds, yoghurt and fermented mare's milk. Spices are few; salt, onion and garlic do most of the work. A visit to a ger always starts with a bowl of salty milk tea, offered with a plate of dried curds, fried dough and cream, before any meat or noodles appear. Flour arrived through trade with China and Russia and is used for dumplings, noodles and fried pastries.

Buuz

The whole country

Steamed dumplings filled with minced mutton or beef, onion and garlic, pleated by hand and left with a small opening at the top. They are the traditional dish eaten at home during Tsagaan Sar, the Lunar New Year, when relatives visit one another.

Khuushuur

The whole country

A flat pastry filled with minced mutton or beef, onion and garlic, folded into a half-moon and fried until golden. Khuushuur is the food of the Naadam festival in July, when stalls near the stadium and the race tracks fry them by the thousand.

Bansh

The whole country

Small dumplings filled with meat, smaller than buuz. Instead of being steamed like buuz, bansh are boiled, often in a clear mutton soup, to make a warming winter meal.

Tsuivan

The whole country

Home-made flat noodles steamed on top of fried strips of meat with onion, carrot and cabbage, then stirred together. It is one of the most common everyday meals in Mongolian homes and cafés.

Guriltai shul

The whole country

A simple, filling soup of mutton, noodles and a few vegetables such as potato, carrot and onion. The name means 'soup with flour', because the noodles are made from flour at home. It is a favourite in the cold months and a common roadside café meal.

Khorkhog

The countryside

A feast dish for guests and special days. Pieces of mutton on the bone are cooked with water, vegetables and fist-sized stones heated in the fire, all sealed inside a metal milk can or pot. When the meat is ready, the hot, greasy stones are passed from hand to hand before the meal.

Boodog

The countryside

A goat or a marmot cooked from the inside: the meat is taken out through the neck, then put back into the skin with red-hot stones, and the outside is singed, today often with a blowtorch. It is prepared for special occasions and is one of the oldest ways of cooking on the steppe.

Chanasan makh

The whole country

Big pieces of mutton on the bone, simply boiled in salted water and served on a platter. Each person cuts off meat with a knife, and the broth can be drunk as soup.

Boortsog

The whole country

Small pieces of dough fried in fat or oil until crisp and golden. They are served with milk tea, often with clotted cream or sugar, for breakfast or as a snack.

Aaruul

The whole country

Dried curds made from the milk left after the cream has been taken off. The curds are pressed, cut into pieces and dried in the sun until they are rock hard. They keep for months and are nibbled slowly as a sour, hard snack, often with milk tea.

Öröm

The whole country

A rich clotted cream. Fresh milk is boiled slowly and left to cool, and the thick layer of cream that forms on top is lifted off. It is eaten spread on bread or boortsog, often with a little sugar, and is one of the best loved 'white foods'.

Ul boov

The whole country

Oblong biscuits pressed with a carved pattern, stacked in a tall pile in the centre of the table for Tsagaan Sar, the Lunar New Year. The layered pile stands for Mount Sumeru, the sacred mountain at the centre of the world in Buddhist belief, and it is shared out among the guests.

Süütei tsai

The whole country

Mongolian milk tea: brick tea boiled in water with milk and a pinch of salt, sometimes with butter. It is drunk many times a day and is always offered to a guest first. It tastes more like a light soup than a sweet drink.

Airag

The steppe, in summer

Fermented mare's milk, slightly sour and fizzy, with only a little alcohol, usually between about 0.7 and 2.5 percent. Mares are milked from mid-June to early October, and the milk is churned for hours in a large leather bag or barrel until it ferments. In summer it is often offered to visitors in a large bowl.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- A guest is always offered milk tea first. Take the bowl with your right hand, or with both hands, and it is polite to support your right elbow with your left hand.
- Try at least a little of everything you are offered, even a small bite or a sip. Refusing food outright is impolite.
- The stove or hearth in the middle of the ger is sacred. Never throw rubbish into the fire.
- Do not point the soles of your feet towards the hearth or the family altar at the back of the ger.
- When khorkhog is served, the hot, greasy stones are passed round from hand to hand before the meal. Take one when it reaches you, then pass it on.
- Older men may offer you a small snuff bottle. Take it with your right hand, sniff the stopper or the bottle, and hand it back with your right hand.

Buuz

Steamed dumplings filled with minced mutton or beef, onion and garlic, pleated by hand and left with a small opening at the top. They are the traditional dish eaten at home during Tsagaan Sar, the Lunar New Year, when relatives visit one another.

Ingredients

- 400 g plain flour
- About 200 ml water
- 500 g minced mutton or beef, with some fat
- 1 large onion, very finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon salt and a little black pepper
- 4 tablespoons cold water for the filling

Method

1. Mix the flour and water into a firm, smooth dough. Cover it and let it rest for 20 minutes.
2. Mix the meat with the onion, garlic, salt, pepper and the cold water until soft and juicy.
3. Roll the dough into a long rope, cut it into walnut-sized pieces and roll each into a circle about 8 cm wide, thinner at the edges.
4. Put a spoonful of filling in the middle, then gather the edge in small pleats around it, leaving a small hole at the top.
5. Steam the buuz on an oiled steamer, not touching, for 15 to 20 minutes, until the meat is cooked through. Serve hot, with salad or soy sauce.

Khuushuur

A flat pastry filled with minced mutton or beef, onion and garlic, folded into a half-moon and fried until golden. Khuushuur is the food of the Naadam festival in July, when stalls near the stadium and the race tracks fry them by the thousand.

Ingredients

- 400 g plain flour
- About 200 ml water
- 500 g minced mutton or beef
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon salt and some black pepper
- 3 tablespoons water for the filling
- Vegetable oil for frying

Method

1. Mix the flour and water into a smooth, firm dough and rest it for 20 minutes under a cloth.
2. Mix the meat, onion, garlic, salt, pepper and water.
3. Cut the dough into 12 pieces and roll each into a thin circle about 12 cm wide.
4. Spread a spoonful of filling over half of each circle, fold the other half over and press the edges firmly, then press the pastry flat with your palm.
5. Fry in 1 cm of hot oil for 3 to 4 minutes on each side, until golden and the meat is cooked through. Drain on paper and eat hot.

Tsuivan

Home-made flat noodles steamed on top of fried strips of meat with onion, carrot and cabbage, then stirred together. It is one of the most common everyday meals in Mongolian homes and cafés.

Ingredients

- 300 g plain flour, a pinch of salt and about 150 ml water, or 400 g fresh flat noodles
- 400 g mutton or beef, cut into thin strips
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 large carrot, cut into thin sticks
- A quarter of a small cabbage, shredded
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- About 200 ml water or stock
- Salt

Method

1. If you make your own noodles, knead the flour, salt and water into a firm dough, roll it out thinly, brush with a little oil and cut it into strips about 5 mm wide.
2. Heat the oil in a wide pan with a lid and fry the meat until browned. Add the onion and carrot and fry for 3 minutes more.
3. Add the cabbage, salt and the water or stock and bring to a simmer.
4. Spread the noodles loosely over the top, cover the pan and let them steam over low heat for about 10 minutes, until tender.
5. Stir the noodles into the meat and vegetables, check the salt and serve.

Guriltai shul

A simple, filling soup of mutton, noodles and a few vegetables such as potato, carrot and onion. The name means 'soup with flour', because the noodles are made from flour at home. It is a favourite in the cold months and a common roadside café meal.

Ingredients

- 400 g mutton or beef, cut into thin strips
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 carrot, cut into thin sticks
- 2 potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1.5 litres water
- 200 g fresh flat noodles
- Salt

Method

1. Fry the meat in the oil in a large pan until browned, then add the onion and fry for 2 minutes.
2. Pour in the water, add salt and bring to the boil. Skim off any foam and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Add the potato and carrot and cook for 10 minutes.
4. Add the noodles and cook for 5 minutes more, until they are soft.
5. Check the salt and serve very hot in deep bowls.

Süütei tsai

Mongolian milk tea: brick tea boiled in water with milk and a pinch of salt, sometimes with butter. It is drunk many times a day and is always offered to a guest first. It tastes more like a light soup than a sweet drink.

Ingredients

- 1 litre water
- 1 tablespoon green brick tea or loose green tea
- 500 ml whole milk
- Half a teaspoon salt, or to taste
- A small knob of butter (optional)

Method

1. Bring the water to the boil and add the tea. Simmer for 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Pour in the milk and bring it back to the boil.
3. Scoop up the tea with a ladle and pour it back into the pot from a height, ten or more times, to mix and cool it a little.
4. Add the salt and the butter if you use it, then strain the tea into bowls.
5. Serve hot, with boortsog or bread and clotted cream.

Useful phrases

Sain baina uu?

SAIN bain OH · Hello, how are you?

Sain, sain

SAIN, SAIN · Fine, fine

Amar baina uu?

AH-mar bain OH · Are you at peace?

Bayarlalaa

BAI-yar-laa · Thank you

Bayartai

BAI-yar-tai · Goodbye

Uuchlaarai

OOCH-laa-rai · Sorry, excuse me

Nokhoi khor!

NO-khoi KHOR · Hold the dog!

Tany neriig khen gedeg ve?

TAH-nee NEH-reeg KHEN GEH-deg VEH · What is your name? (polite)

Minii neriig ... gedeg

MEE-nee NEH-reeg ... GEH-deg · My name is ...

Ta angliar yaridag uu?

TAH ANG-lee-ar YAH-ree-dag OH · Do you speak English?

Bi oilgokhgüi baina

BEE oil-gokh-GWEE bain · I don't understand

Ene khed ve?

EN KHED VEH · How much is this?

Jorlon khaana baina ve?

JOR-lon KHAAN bain VEH · Where is the toilet?

Saikhan khoollooroi

SAI-khan KHOL-lo-roi · Enjoy your meal

Goyo amttai baisan

GO-yo AMT-tai BAI-san · That was delicious

Tuslaarai!

TOS-laa-rai · Help!

Things you might not know

1. As of 2026, Mongolia is the most sparsely populated sovereign country in the world, with only about two people for every square kilometre.
2. Ulaanbaatar is the coldest national capital in the world by average yearly temperature. In January the temperature can fall to between minus 36 and minus 40 °C.
3. The Mongol Empire, founded by Genghis Khan in 1206, was the largest contiguous land empire in history. At its height it stretched from the Sea of Japan to Eastern Europe.
4. Mongolia is the second largest landlocked country in the world, after Kazakhstan.
5. Mongolia has far more farm animals than people. At the end of 2025 the national count found about 58 million sheep, goats, cattle, horses and camels, around 16 for every person.
6. The traditional Mongolian script is written from top to bottom, in columns that run from left to right. It came from the Old Uyghur alphabet in the time of Genghis Khan and, as of 2026, is used alongside Cyrillic in official documents.
7. Przewalski's horse, called takhi in Mongolian, disappeared from the wild in 1969. Horses bred in zoos were brought back to Mongolia from 1992, and herds now live again in Hustai National Park and other reserves.
8. In 1923 an American expedition led by Roy Chapman Andrews found fossil dinosaur eggs at the Flaming Cliffs in the Gobi, which made the site famous around the world.
9. The morin khuur, the horsehead fiddle, has only two strings, traditionally made of horse hair, and a scroll carved like a horse's head. It is on UNESCO's list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.
10. At the Naadam festival in July, the horse races are ridden by children, usually between 5 and 13 years old, across open country. Naadam was added to UNESCO's intangible heritage list in 2010.
11. Lake Khövsgöl holds almost 70 percent of Mongolia's fresh water and about 0.4 percent of all the fresh water in the world.

12. Mongolia's domestic camels are Bactrian camels, with two humps. They cope with the Gobi's heat in summer and its bitter cold in winter.
13. In July 2026 UNESCO added the Cemetery Complexes of the Xiongnu Nobility, the tombs of the nomad empire that ruled the steppe more than 2,000 years ago, to the World Heritage List. As of 2026, Mongolia has seven World Heritage Sites.
14. Despite its long, harsh winters, Mongolia has more than 250 sunny days a year.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Mongolia, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Buuz or Khuushuur? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The peaceful Democratic Revolution (1990). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- A new constitution takes effect (1992). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Erdene Zuu Monastery, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Mongolia, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Mongolia?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. The Mongol Empire was the largest what in history?

- A) Contiguous land empire
- B) Empire by length of rule
- C) Sea empire
- D) Overseas colonial empire

2. What is added to Mongolian milk tea, süütei tsai, that surprises many visitors?

- A) Lemon
- B) Sugar
- C) Salt
- D) Cinnamon

3. As of 2026, Mongolia is the most sparsely populated sovereign country in the world.

- A) True
- B) False

4. What are buuz?

- A) Dried curds
- B) Steamed meat dumplings
- C) Fermented mare's milk
- D) Fried dough pieces

5. Around which industry did the city of Erdenet grow up after 1974?

- A) A copper mine
- B) A cotton mill
- C) A fishing port
- D) A car factory

6. What should you call out as you approach a ger in the countryside?

- A) Tuslaarai! (Help!)
- B) Ene khed ve? (How much is this?)
- C) Bayartai! (Goodbye!)
- D) Nokhoi khor! (Hold the dog!)

7. Aaruul is a sweet, soft cake eaten warm from the oven.

- A) True
- B) False

8. From which empire did Mongolia declare independence in 1911?

- A) The Japanese Empire
- B) The Russian Empire
- C) The Ottoman Empire
- D) The Qing empire of China

9. What did Roy Chapman Andrews' expedition find at the Flaming Cliffs in 1923?

- A) Gold coins from Karakorum
- B) A buried Mongol army
- C) The tomb of Genghis Khan
- D) Fossil dinosaur eggs

10. Mongolia has fewer farm animals than people.

- A) True
- B) False

11. When is the national Naadam festival held?

- A) 11 to 13 July
- B) The last week of September
- C) 1 to 3 January
- D) The Lunar New Year

12. The grave of Genghis Khan is in the middle of Sükhbaatar Square.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. A) Contiguous land empire

It was the largest contiguous land empire: at its height the Mongol Empire stretched without a break from the Sea of Japan to Eastern Europe.

2. C) Salt

Süütei tsai is brick tea boiled with milk and a pinch of salt, sometimes with butter. It is always offered to a guest first.

3. True

True. With about 3.6 million people on 1.56 million km², Mongolia has only about two people per square kilometre.

4. B) Steamed meat dumplings

Buuz are steamed meat dumplings, filled with minced mutton or beef, the traditional dish of Tsagaan Sar, the Lunar New Year.

5. A) A copper mine

Erdenet was founded in 1974 for a copper mine, a huge one that earns a large share of Mongolia's income.

6. D) Nokhoi khor! (Hold the dog!)

Nokhoi khor! (Hold the dog!) is called out instead of knocking, so the family can hold back their guard dogs.

7. False

False. Aaruul are dried curds, pressed and dried in the sun until they are hard and sour. They keep for months.

8. D) The Qing empire of China

The Qing empire of China was collapsing. Mongolian nobles declared independence on 1 December 1911, and on 29 December the Bogd Khan was enthroned as their monarch.

9. D) Fossil dinosaur eggs

The 1923 discovery of fossil dinosaur eggs made the Flaming Cliffs, in the Gobi, famous around the world.

10. False

False. At the end of 2025 Mongolia counted about 58 million farm animals, around 16 for every person.

11. A) 11 to 13 July

Naadam is held from 11 to 13 July, with wrestling, horse racing and archery. Book hotels and tours well ahead.

12. False

False. Genghis Khan died in 1227, and the place of his grave is still unknown.

Mongolia visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

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