

TRANS MONGOLIAN WITH

We all love to travel. It is in our blood to explore and to find new places and different cultures. The Trans Mongolian rail journey is something everyone should do at least once in their lifetime. I have created this sheet to help you plan your rail journey whether it is your first time travelling or you are ready for that journey of a lifetime, it is probably time to make that dream become a reality.

I'm told I'm a lucky person being paid to tell people where to go! I'm looking forward to helping you.

The Trans Mongolian train is the romantic name for train number four from Beijing to Moscow via Mongolia and the Trans Manchurian the romantic name for train number nineteen from Beijing to Moscow via Manchuria. The best known of course, is the Trans Siberian, which is the romantic name for train number one from Vladivostok to Moscow.

All three meet up near the Siberian city of Ulan Ude from where they join forces on the same track to Moscow, still four days away. Most travellers do not do the journey in one hit but break their journey at various cities along the way. The train numbers then change as you will be taking a different train between any two given cities. Rail passes do not exist within and between China, Mongolia and Russia. You have to buy a separate ticket for travel between any two towns.

Special fares

Airlines such as Finnair, Korean Airlines and Lufthansa have reduced or special fares which allow you to travel by rail one way and by flight the other way.

How long should I take?

For the purpose of this information page we will be travelling East to West with trains mostly odd numbered. Of course you can travel West to East which means train numbers will be even numbered with different times and days of departure.

If you want a non-stop trip from Beijing to Moscow it will take you six nights and train #3 departs Beijing to Moscow on a Wednesday and travels via Mongolia. This trip is good if your time is short and you want a different way to travel to Europe.

However most people stop in Ulaan Baatar (UB), Irkutsk, Moscow and St Petersburg. A good trip takes about 3 weeks as follows.

Day 1: Depart Beijing
 Day 2: Arrive UB.
 Day 3: Drive to the Terelj National Park and spend two nights in a Ger.
 Day 4: In the Terelj.
 Day 5: Drive back to UB.
 Day 6: Depart for Irkutsk.
 Day 7: on the train.
 Day 8: Arrive Irkutsk and drive to the village of Listvyanka on the shores of Lake Baikal.
 Day 10: In Listvyanka.
 Day 11: Drive back to Irkutsk for train to Moscow.
 Day 12-13: On the train.
 Day 14: Arrive Moscow and here for three nights.
 Day 17: Depart for St Petersburg.
 Day 18: Arrive St Petersburg and here for three nights.
 Day 21: End of trip.

However there are many places to stop between Irkutsk and Moscow such as Ekaterinburg, Tobolsk, Tomsk, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod and Vladimir. The

various guide books will help you with more information.

Between Moscow and St Petersburg you can stop at the old capital of Novgorod or travel north across the Arctic Circle to Murmansk and then back down again. [Click here for more details.](#)

Entry into China

There are many ways of entering China. You could fly straight into Beijing and spend a few days there visiting the Forbidden City, The Great wall, Tiananmen Square and the Summer Palace before boarding the train.

You could also fly into Hong Kong and then go by rail to Beijing. Trains depart every second day for the 30 hour trip.

There are also ferries operating from Japan and Korea.

Exit from Russia

There are a number of choices here.

To Finland - The easiest way is by train from St Petersburg to Finland, a trip of about 6 hours and at least 2 trains a day.

To Warsaw and Berlin - there are regular trains from Moscow and St Petersburg travelling via Belarus. However the visa for Belarus is very problematic and most people don't take this option.

To Estonia - There are many buses and trains from St Petersburg to Tallinn.

To Ukraine - There are regular overnight trains to Kiev from both Moscow and St Petersburg.

To Norway - Travel north by overnight train to Murmansk and then by bus across the border to Kirkenes. [Click here for more details.](#)

And for those with time on their hands you could take the train all the way from Saigon to Edinburgh.

Visas

For this trip you will require three visas; China, Mongolia and Russia. The first two or fairly easy to obtain but you have to be invited into Russia. This is a relic of the old USSR and employs so many people that the system is still used.

The rules for the Russian visa state that you must have every night booked and accounted for before you can obtain the visa invite.

If you book a trip with me I obtain this invite for you and then you apply to the nearest Russian Consulate.

The maximum length of stay you are given in each country is 30 days however, it is relatively easy to extend the China and Mongolian visas when you are in the country. It is almost impossible to stay longer in Russia once you are there and if you decide the stay longer without an extension you will be heavily fined. **You have been warned!!**

Independent or group travel?

This is something you decide yourself. Group travel is easy but more expensive and there are a number of companies offering many different itineraries.

Independent travel forms two aspects; one where you just go and do your own

thing and one where I book as much or as little as possible. If you are doing it all by yourself the hardest part is the Russian visa.

I have operators all along the journey who I have been using for many years and most I now have a personal relationship with.

To help plan your journey I charge \$55 which comes off the price of the trip if you book.

My trip on the Trans Mongolian

I decided on the Trans Mongolian and I did it in winter. Why? Because I like winter with its mantles of snow covered landscapes. And I just love the cold. For the train spotters amongst you, my train numbers were 23, 263, 9 (The Baikal), 3 and I finished by taking train number 35 from St Petersburg to Helsinki. They may not be the fastest trains in the world but speed is not the reason why you are here.

It was a fun trip and one I had always wanted to do. It was full of memorable people, great friendships, generous hospitality and lots of vodka. It was long border crossings, endless birch tree forests, remote villages lost in time and stories to keep me going for the rest of my life.

One memory which stands out, however, is the Mongolians and Russians love affair with ice cream. Even in winter at minus twenty degrees Celsius! And there wasn't a freezer in sight. The street vendors just sell straight from the cardboard box. Certainly saves on the power bill!

Christmas to me is snow and that is what it did for me on Christmas Day in Ulaan Baatar. Four of us enjoyed Mongolian hospitality and of course lots of Vodka. What more can a Scotsman ask? I then shared New Year's Day with a Russian family in the village of Listvyanka on the shores of frozen

Lake Baikal and celebrated Russian Orthodox Christmas Day with some friends in Moscow.

Border crossings can be both fun and tedious. At the China/Mongolia border the carriages are raised up on pneumatic jacks and the bogies changed as the rail gauges are different. You can either stay in the carriage or go to the waiting room on the platform. It was the middle of the night and our passports had been taken away by the immigration police. Inside the carriage it was twenty five degrees while outside it was minus twenty five degrees.

I went to the waiting room. But it was even colder inside than outside. There was no heating except for body heat. But the duty free bar was open! Beer and vodka only of course. Oh, and some chocolate bars. So when in Rome...

The trains keep to excellent time and make a number of stops along the way. If the guide book says it is a five minute stop then that is what it is. A word of warning though - in Russia most trains work on Moscow time so double check and make sure you don't miss that weekly train! Don't stray too far from the train and don't cross any railway tracks. Nothing worse than taking a photo and watching another train pulling in and blocking your access back to your train.

As airfares increase more people are taking the train to Europe. It is now possible to start in Ho Chi Minh (Saigon) and travel by train all the way to Paris via Moscow. Some airlines have even reduced airfares to compensate for not using the long haul flight from Asia to Europe.

To me the highlight was Mongolia. I want to go again but perhaps in autumn when the heat has gone and the colours are changing.