

Ulaanbaatar: Tents and Skyscrapers

Like nearly one half of the Mongolian population, the capital city of Ulaanbaatar is a nomad. The city has changed locations more than twenty times over the past 350 years before taking root in its current location in a sweeping valley bounded by four sacred peaks, including the Bogd Khan mountain in the south.



Besides its location the capital has also changed its names several times over the years, having been called Urguu from 1639 to 1706, Ih Huree from 1706 to 1911, Niislel Huree from 1911 to 1923, and finally Ulaanbaatar since 1924 (meaning “Red Hero”). But despite its many transformations, Mongolia’s capital has remained constant as the political, economic, and cultural center of the nation, and as a city rich in both character and contrast. Indeed there aren’t many world capitals in which you can ride a horse, visit a nomadic family, and enjoy fine dining and luxurious spa treatments all in the same day.

Ulaanbaatar today is a vibrant city of more than one million residents. The city reflects a close and sometimes amusing juxtaposition of nomadic traditions and modern society, perhaps best summarized by its skyline dotted with both gers (felt tents) and towering skyscrapers. The city’s contrast can also be found among those who call it home, from traditional–clothing–clad herders, to Armani–suit–wearing business men and women, to a growing number of ex–patriots hailing from nearly every corner of the globe. Only in Ulaanbaatar you can find a horse cart bouncing down the central avenue alongside a Mercedes Benz, or a market selling both livestock and designer clothing. In short, there is something for everyone, and always a site to behold in Ulaanbaatar.



If cities have a heart, and they certainly do, then the heart of Ulaanbaatar is Sukhbaatar Square. This sprawling plaza situated in front of the capital building, is the place where residents and visitors gather for celebrations, exhibitions, and concerts, or just for a leisurely stroll with friends. Running along the southern edge of the square is Enkh Taivny Orgon Choloo (Peace Avenue), Ulaanbaatar’s main

thoroughfare, which spans from East to West across the city. On Peace Avenue, you'll find a myriad of shopping hotspots, selling everything from cashmere, to antiques and souvenirs, to high fashion couture. You'll also find a surprising variety of restaurants, bars, and cafes, serving up Italian, French, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, American, and Mongolian cuisine, to name but a few.



Besides serving as the jumping off point for all travel throughout the country, Ulaanbaatar has much to offer its visitors. The city's eight museums are bursting at the seams with treasures such as 3,000 year old Hunnu artifacts, prehistoric dinosaur bones, and Genghis Khan-era armor and weapons. Dozens of cultural venues throughout the city present daily performances of dance, theatre, music, and contortionism. The city is also home to one of the world's largest open air markets, Narantuul, with more than 2500 vendors selling everything under the sun.

<http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn>

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