

# Overseas Adventure Travel<sup>®</sup>

THE LEADER IN PERSONALIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide<sup>®</sup>



South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines &  
Seaside Treasures

2025

# Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who personalize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis  
Chair  
Overseas Adventure Travel

# CONTENTS

---

## ***SOUTH KOREA & JAPAN: TEMPLES, SHRINES & SEASIDE TREASURES***

Your Adventure at a Glance:	
Where You're Going, What it Costs, and What's Included .....	<b>4</b>
Your Detailed Day-To-Day Itinerary .....	<b>6</b>
Pre-Trip Extensions .....	<b>18</b>
Post-Trip Extension .....	<b>28</b>

## **ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION**

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements...	<b>31</b>
Rigors, Vaccines & General Health .....	<b>33</b>
Money Matters: Local Currency & Tipping Guidelines.....	<b>38</b>
Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch .....	<b>41</b>
Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits...	<b>45</b>
Climate & Average Temperatures .....	<b>52</b>

## **ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE**

South Korean and Japanese Culture .....	<b>55</b>
Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More .....	<b>62</b>

## **DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY**

Japan .....	<b>66</b>
South Korea.....	<b>68</b>
Mongolia .....	<b>70</b>
Vietnam .....	<b>73</b>

## **RESOURCES**

Suggested Reading .....	<b>76</b>
Suggested Films & Videos .....	<b>78</b>
Useful Websites .....	<b>81</b>
Useful Apps .....	<b>82</b>



Kyoto, Japan

## South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines & Seaside Treasures

### Small Group Adventure

**South Korea:** Seoul | **Japan:** Tokyo, Toba, Kyoto

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

**16 days starting from \$7,495**

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit [www.oattravel.com/jko2025pricing](http://www.oattravel.com/jko2025pricing)

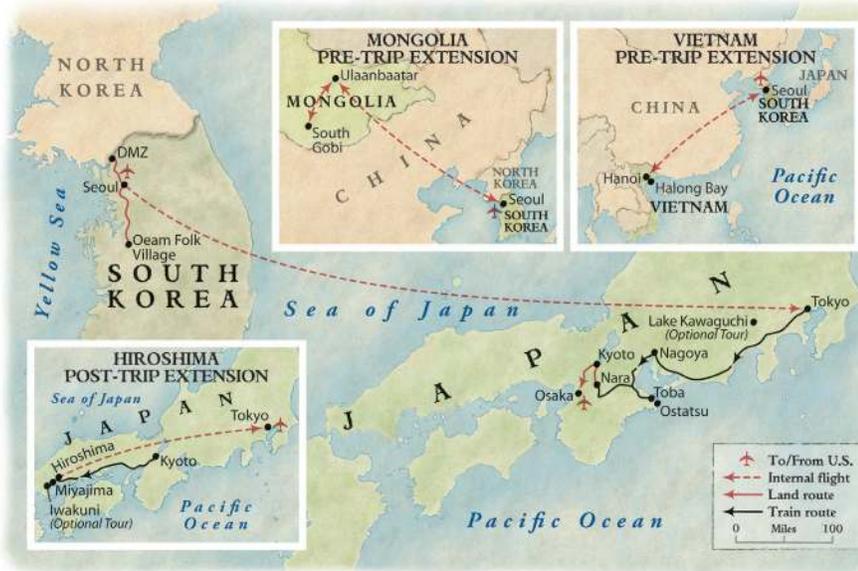
Discover the ancient kingdoms and modern cities of Japan and South Korea—now with an extra night in Tokyo. From Seoul, where the “Miracle of the Han” buzzes with life, to Kyoto with its serene temples and shrines, exploring these two empires offers an experience like no other. Along the way, we’ll engage with local culture, like meeting Japan’s *ama*, or “sea women,” who brave frigid waters to dive for pearls in Toba. Plus, we’ll experience *A Day in the Life* of rural South Korea.

### IT'S INCLUDED

- 14 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation, including bullet train, ferries, and 1 internal flight
- 31 meals—14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 7 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Lunch)
- 20 small group activities
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next O.A.T. trip

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.

South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines & Seaside Treasures



## ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Seoul, South Korea
2-6	Seoul
7-10	Tokyo, Japan
11-12	Toba
13-15	Kyoto
16	Return to U.S.

## PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

### OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar & the Gobi Desert

PRE-TRIP: 9 nights from **\$3,695**

Vietnam: Hanoi & Halong Bay Cruise

PRE-TRIP: 5 nights from **\$1,495**

Hiroshima: City of Peace

POST-TRIP: 3 nights from **\$1,795**

### ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Ulaanbaatar** before your Mongolia pre-trip extension from **\$200** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Hanoi** before your Vietnam pre-trip extension from **\$90** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Seoul** before your main adventure from **\$180** per room, per night

## WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

**Pacing:** 4 locations in 15 days

**Physical requirements:** Must be able to walk 3-6 miles unassisted each day and participate in 3-5 hours of daily physical activities, including scaling several steep steps without handrails. Luggage porters are unavailable at hotels and on trains.

**Flight time:** Travel time will be 10-21 hours and will most likely have one to three connections

View all physical requirements at [www.oattravel.com/jko](http://www.oattravel.com/jko)

## SOUTH KOREA & JAPAN: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

**Unbeatable Value:** Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

**People-to-People Experiences:** Experience *A Day in the Life* of Oeam Folk Village, whose residents preserve traditions and lifestyles originating in 1397. You'll also sit down with a South Korean family and make cultural connections over a **Home-Hosted Lunch** and meet local Japanese *ama*, or "sea women," who free dive without a breathing apparatus for marine delicacies in Toba.

**O.A.T. Exclusives:** During your adventure, you'll have the opportunity to learn about several **Controversial Topics**, such as meeting a defector from North Korea to get a sobering glimpse of life under the country's oppressive regime. You'll also visit a church in Seoul—a **Grand Circle Foundation** site—where you'll learn about the controversial use of "baby boxes."

# South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines & Seaside Treasures

## YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

### BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

#### 9 nights in *Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar & the Gobi Desert*

**Day 1** Depart U.S.

**Day 2** Fly to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia via Seoul, South Korea

**Day 3** Arrive in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia via Seoul, South Korea

**Day 4** Explore Ulaanbaatar • Meet a female shaman

**Day 5** Ulaanbaatar • Gandan Monastery • Visit cashmere factory

**Day 6** Ulaanbaatar • Genghis Khan monument • Home-Hosted Lunch

**Day 7** Fly to the Gobi Desert

**Day 8** Gobi Desert • Camel ride in the dunes • Flaming Cliffs

**Day 9** Explore Yol Valley

**Day 10** Fly to Ulaanbaatar • Optional Mongolian Dinner & Musical Performance

**Day 11** Ulaanbaatar • **Controversial Topic:** Mongolia's relationship with two superpowers: Russia and China • Child Protection and Development Center visit

**Day 12** Ulaanbaatar • Fly to Seoul, South Korea

OR

#### 5 nights in *Vietnam: Hanoi & Halong Bay Cruise*

**Day 1** Depart U.S.

**Day 2** Arrive in Seoul, South Korea • Fly to Hanoi, Vietnam

**Day 3** Explore Hanoi • Water puppet demonstration

**Day 4** Hanoi • Visit Bat Trang ceramic village

**Day 5** Overland to Halong Bay • Meet a communist veteran

**Day 6** Halong Bay Cruise

**Day 7** Fly to Seoul, South Korea & begin main trip

## Day 1 Depart U.S.

**Afternoon/Evening:** Depart today on an overnight flight from the U.S. to Seoul, South Korea.

## Day 2 Arrive in Seoul, South Korea

- Destination: Seoul
- Accommodations: Pacific Hotel or similar

**Afternoon:** Arrive in Seoul, where an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and escort you to the hotel. Here we'll be joined by travelers who took our optional *New! Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar & the Gobi Desert* or *Vietnam: Hanoi & Halong Bay Cruise* pre-trip extensions.

Nicknamed “The Miracle on the Han” for its stunning rebirth after near destruction in the Korean War, Seoul is sure to make quite an impression at first sight. Watched over by four “guardian” mountains, the metropolis is a buzzing, fast-paced playground for its ten million residents. Awash in neon lights at night and humming with activity by day, its energetic spirit might keep you from noticing that it is also home to serene temples and hiking trails leading into the mountains. It's a diverse trove of delights just waiting for your discovery. Our Trip Experience Leader will give orientation walks throughout the day.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 3 Gyeongbok Palace • National Museum of Korea

- Destination: Seoul
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pacific Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** If Day 3 falls on Tuesday, Gyeongbok Palace will be replaced with Changdeokgung Palace, another well-preserved royal palace dating back to the Joseon Dynasty.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, our Trip Experience Leader will conduct a Welcome Briefing.

Then we'll depart for Gyeongbok Palace, also known as the Northern Palace. This 14th-century site is the largest of the “Five Grand Palaces” of Korea's longest ruling family, the Joseon Dynasty, and earns its nickname from its location farther north than the other four palace complexes. We'll explore the massive compound, which includes multiple museums, ornamental gardens and some of Seoul's most impressive architectural sights.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Next, we'll visit the National Museum of Korea, where we'll witness a vast collection of historical artifacts. From traditional pagodas to gold-encrusted crowns and Buddhist sculptures, we'll examine a multitude of national treasures that reflect Korea's complex history.

**Dinner:** A Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## **Day 4 Seoul • Grand Circle Foundation visit: The Baby Box Center • Home-Hosted Lunch**

- Destination: Seoul
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Pacific Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll visit the Baby Box Center and learn how **Grand Circle Corporation** is aiding the center's efforts in helping abandoned babies.

### **Grand Circle Foundation**

#### **Baby Box Center**

Total donated: **\$6,416**

Partner since: **2019**

Decades ago, Pastor Lee Jong-Rak woke to find a baby freezing on his doorstep with nothing more than a cardboard box to protect the infant from the blustery winter wind. This horrifying discovery eventually led him to install a "drop box" in the wall of his home, which would provide a safe way for people to anonymously leave unwanted babies. Since its inception, more than 2,000 newborns have been left in the box, a service that is entirely funded by private donations. In addition to the temperature-controlled box, the church also offers help to single mothers faced with this difficult decision, such as temporary shelter, food, and monetary support. Funding from Grand Circle Foundation has helped clean the facility, built a rooftop storage shed for winter clothes, diapers, formula and other goods, as well as sponsored a much-needed rooftop recreation area.

**Lunch:** We'll split into smaller groups and depart for a **Home-Hosted Lunch** with local families who live in various apartments throughout the area.

During this enlightening exchange, we'll learn about our hosts while enjoying a traditional meal such as *bibimbap*, a combination of rice, mushrooms, seasonal vegetables, and fried egg served in a bowl. You will also likely sample some popular Korean side dishes, such as *kimchi*.

We'll finish our lunch with a cup of tea as we wrap up our visit. Then we'll bid farewell to our kind hosts and drive back to our hotel.

**Afternoon:** The remainder of the day is free. Perhaps you'll take a river cruise down the enchanting Han River, taking in views of the glittering cityscape. Alternatively, you may wish to check with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer you their favorite local spot.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. You might head out to one of Seoul's local bars for a nightcap.

## **Day 5 Seoul • A Day in the Life of Oeam Folk village**

- Destination: Seoul
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pacific Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll depart for our **A Day in the Life** experience of the UNESCO-listed Oeam village, a historic community dating back to the Joseon period. Here, we'll meet with the community leader for an introduction to the village, as well as a walk around the premises. Founded in the early 16th century by members of the Kang and Mok clans, Oeam currently has a population of just 192 people, most of whom earn a living through agriculture.

After our introduction, we'll make our way to the home of a local woman who will teach us how to make *gochujang*, a sweet and savory red chili paste. We'll see firsthand how this spicy, fermented sauce brings bold flavor to any Korean dish. After our cooking class, we'll then continue on to the home of another resident, who is a descendant of a Joseon Dynasty royal court officer. Here, we'll learn how to make *Yunyupju*, a traditional liquor once served to kings made from the blossoms and the leaves of the lotus. We'll be using a secret recipe that has been passed down from generations of this family, giving us a rare glimpse into authentic South Korean culture.

**Lunch:** At the home of another resident, where we'll help our hosts prepare lunch. Over this traditional meal, we'll get the chance to ask our host any questions we have about daily life and the village's traditions.

**Afternoon:** We'll bid our hosts and the village farewell and drive back to Seoul, where you'll have the rest of the day to make your own discoveries.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant, featuring authentic Korean fare. We'll raise our glasses and say "*gunbae*" (cheers)!

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. You might head out to one of Seoul's local bars for a nightcap.

## **Day 6 Seoul • Visit the DMZ • Controversial Topic: Life in North Korea and the second-class status of defectors**

- Destination: Seoul
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Pacific Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Depending on whether Day 6 falls on a national holiday or Monday, the order of the activities on Days 5 and 6 may switch. Although the order in which the days' activities take place may differ, all included features of the trip will remain the same. Since the DMZ is operated by the military, the area may be closed without prior notice. Please also be aware that inside the DMZ travelers will have the option to walk through one of the underground tunnels if it is open (650 feet long one way, with flat terrain, and a smooth slope).

**Breakfast:** Enjoy a boxed breakfast en route to the DMZ.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll drive into the Demilitarized Zone (or "DMZ") between North and South Korea.

In 1953, North and South Korea worked out an agreement (with prodding from China and the U.S.) to allow for a buffer zone separating the ideologically opposed regions. Whenever the two Koreas need to negotiate, they enter the DMZ. As carefully controlled as that may sound, four tunnels beneath the DMZ have been discovered, one of which appeared to be part of a North Korean plot to attack Seoul. Monitoring has been constant ever since.

Here, we'll visit an exhibition hall detailing the Korean War, as well as the Dorasan Observatory where we'll get another glimpse across the border and into North Korea.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll drive back to Seoul. Upon arrival, we'll have some free time to explore or relax on our own before we're met by a refugee from North Korea to discuss the **Controversial Topic** of life in North Korea—and the second-class treatment of defectors who make it to South Korea.

As an isolationist, dictatorship regime, North Korea frequently tops the lists of countries with the worst human rights violations. In fact, a survey conducted from 2015 to 2018 by the Seoul-based Transitional Justice Working Group found that three out of four North Korean defectors had personally experienced physical violence or the death of a close family member before choosing to flee the state. In North Korea, even the smallest of crimes—such as watching a Hollywood film, speaking negatively about the government, or making unauthorized international phone calls—are punishable by torture, prison, or death (for both the perpetrator and their families). Detention in concentration camps and forced starvation are not uncommon. Even those North Koreans who manage to escape the ire of their government are subjected to harsh lives of scarcity, oppression, and the absence of technological advancements. Most North Koreans, for example, do not have access to the Internet.

We'll hear about what life in North Korea is like firsthand during a conversation with a defector who made the perilous journey across the border. Sadly, for many defectors, the hardships continue even south of the border. Discrimination against North Koreans is common, making it difficult for defectors to obtain jobs and access to medical care. Often, they are treated as second-class citizens in their new homes. In a recent poll conducted by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, around 50% of defectors claimed that they experienced discrimination from their

South Korean neighbors. Our Trip Experience Leader can help provide cultural context to explain how attitudes towards these defectors have developed over time.

We'll bid our guest speaker farewell after our conversation, and the rest of the day is yours to spend as you wish.

**Dinner:** On your own this evening. Perhaps you'd like to seek out the Korean delicacy of *samgyeopsal*, grilled pork belly.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. For a striking view of the city at night, visit YTN Seoul Tower, a communication and observation tower located atop Namsan Mountain. This viewing deck is the second-highest point in the city.

## **Day 7 Seoul • Fly to Haneda, Japan • Transfer to Tokyo**

- Destination: Tokyo
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Kinshicho or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we bid farewell to South Korea. We'll drive to Gimpo airport to catch our flight to Haneda, Japan.

**Lunch:** On your own at the airport. Your Trip Experience Leader is happy to provide suggestions.

**Afternoon:** Upon our arrival, we will meet our Japanese Trip Experience Leader, and drive to our hotel in Tokyo.

Tokyo is a feast for the senses—a city where one of the world's tallest towers (the 2,000-foot-high Sky Tree) coexists with humble Shinto shrines nestled along narrow alleys. It offers whatever kind of cultural experience you desire: You can dine here

at more Michelin-starred restaurants than anywhere else on Earth, follow cobbled lanes once walked by *geishas*, stroll among the cherry trees, or bask in the up-all-night neon glow of Asia's busiest city.

Later today, we'll gather in the hotel's breakfast area for a Welcome Briefing, during which we'll review the Japanese portion of our itinerary in more detail, including any changes that may need to occur. Afterwards, you may wish to join our Trip Experience Leader on an optional orientation walk around the vicinity of our hotel. The remainder of the day is yours to explore independently.

**Dinner:** On your own. If you enjoy soup, traditional *ramen* is a great dish to seek out while you're in Japan.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. You may set off for the Ginza district, famous for its high-class shops and glitzy galleries.

### **Day 8 Tokyo • Meet a former sumo wrestler • Learn from a *Bonsai* master**

- Destination: Tokyo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Kinshicho or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll get an authentic glimpse of a beloved Japanese sport—Sumo wrestling. We'll meet with a former wrestler to hear about the skill and power that goes into this sport. We'll also speak with the wrestler about the controversial bullying of young Sumo learners, which you'll have the opportunity to ask him questions about.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll drive to a local *Bonsai* garden, where we'll be greeted by a *Bonsai* master and introduced to this unique cultivation technique. The practice of *Bonsai* involves placing small trees in containers and pruning them to mimic the shape and scale of a full-size tree. Today, we'll learn how these plants are maintained, as well as the history of the art form. You may ask any questions you have.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 9 Tokyo • *Taiko* drumming experience • Explore Asakusa**

- Destination: Tokyo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Kinshicho or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll visit a nearby *taiko* studio. *Taiko* are traditional drums that have been used throughout Japan's history—from setting the beat for marching armies to adding a tempo to boisterous festivals. Upon arrival, we'll remove our shoes and descend into the soundproof studio, where we'll be greeted by the *taiko* drum master. We'll learn from the master about the significance of this musical instrument in local culture, and later observe a short performance. We'll even get to try our hand at drumming with a short intensive introduction to the art form followed by time to perform patterns and rhythms on our own, as well as within the group. After our immersive musical experience, we'll then hear from the drum master about their personal

relationship with drumming, as well as the concerns about keeping this longstanding tradition alive.

Then, we'll walk around the well-known district of Asakusa. As we explore this part of the city, we'll see where old meets new. While the appearance of Asakusa retains its historical charm, we'll find modern innovations in the district's shopping area. We'll visit the Asakusa Temple, the oldest temple in Tokyo, which will give us some architectural and cultural insight into this ancient city.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** You have the option to continue exploring Asakusa, or return to the hotel by subway. For those who stay in Asakusa, your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** Free to spend as you'd like. Perhaps you'll venture to Akihabara, a bustling shopping district famous for its electronic retailers. Here, you can also see another side of modern Japanese art at a number of the *manga* (Japanese comics and graphic novels) and anime (hand-drawn and computer-animated Japanese media) stores.

## **Day 10 Tokyo • NEW Optional Mount Fuji Discoveries tour**

- Destination: Tokyo
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Kinshicho or similar

**Activity Note:** Kubota Itchiku Art Museum is privately owned and may be closed with little notice. In the event we cannot visit the museum during our optional tour today, we will enjoy

alternate activities this afternoon, including viewing traditional Japanese thatch houses and visiting Oishi Park & Fuji Mountain Museum.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Take advantage of our newly-added extra day in Tokyo to explore Japan's iconic capital on your own—an enhanced feature for 2024.

Or, you may choose to take part in our NEW full-day optional tour to discover Kawaguchiko, the unique region surrounding Mount Fuji. We'll head to Shinjuku Station, where we'll set off via motorcoach and drive to our first stop, Oshino Hakkai.

We'll arrive in Oshino, a small village in the Fuji Five Lakes region, and visit Oshino Hakkai—a series of eight sparkling ponds. Fed by the snow melt of Mount Fuji, these ponds are famous for their crystal-clear waters. As the snow melts and flows down the mountain's slopes, the water is naturally filtered through porous layers of lava rock, resulting in extremely fresh spring water held in high esteem by the locals.

During our visit, we'll explore the Hannoki Bayashi Shiryokan—a small open-air museum that encircles Oshino Hakkai's largest pond. Exhibits include a traditional farmhouse with its distinctive thatched roof. Inside, we'll find displays of traditional farming tools and household items, as well as samurai armor and weapons.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Or, for those who have joined our optional tour, enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Continue to uncover more of Tokyo on your own.

If you have joined our optional tour, you'll visit nearby Kubota Itchiku Art Museum. This museum is dedicated to the art of the *kimono*, and its impressive collection features 104 *kimono* created by famed Japanese artist Itchiku Kubota.

Throughout his decades-long career—from the late 1970s to his death in 2003—Kubota revived 16th-century *kimono*-making techniques and modernized them with his own distinctive style. Each piece lavishly created, Kubota elevated the *kimono* from wearable art to installation pieces. One of the highlights of this collection is known as the Symphony of Light—a group of 36 *kimono* that create one impressive composition, depicting seasonal Japanese landscapes that flow from one garment to another. We'll also witness Kubota's Mount Fuji and Oceans series which highlights the artist's sincere reverence for nature through two themes frequently found in Japanese art: Mount Fuji and water in its many forms.

Afterwards, we'll drive to our next destination, Oishi Park. This stop will be our grand finale of the day, as Oishi Park offers spectacular views of the lake and Mount Fuji—san herself. We'll stroll the serene park before heading to Kawaguchiko Station to take our motorcoach back to Tokyo.

**Dinner:** On your own. Perhaps you'll seek out *gyoza* (fried dumplings).

**Evening:** The rest of the evening is free.

### **Day 11 Tokyo • Bullet train to Nagoya • Train ride to Ise • Toba**

- Destination: Toba
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Todaya or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll experience the thrill of riding the lightning-fast bullet train from Tokyo to Nagoya. The Japanese call this train the *shinkansen*. It is one of the world's finest quick-transit trains, and still among the fastest trains in the world, traveling at speeds of up to 160 mph. We'll arrive in Nagoya and hop aboard the Kintetsu Express train to continue our transfer to Yjiyamada Station.

**Lunch:** On your own at the train station, where there will be a variety of choices. Perhaps you'll enjoy a traditional bento box, a single-portion meal with rice or noodles, meat or fish, and often vegetables. Check with your Trip Experience Leader if you have any questions about other dining options while in transit.

**Afternoon:** We'll arrive at Ujiyamada Station and then drive to the famous Ise Shrine, which is actually a collection of many shrines—a riverside complex with some structures dating back 2,000 years. Enjoy a walking tour through the shrines before returning to check in to our hotel in Toba.

**Dinner:** Tonight we'll enjoy a *ryokan*-style dinner, an elaborate, multi-course meal typically featuring a variety of ingredients and artfully-arranged dishes.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 12 Toba • Meet local *ama***

- Destination: Toba
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Todaya or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll visit a pearl farming family. Here, we'll witness a hands-on pearl harvesting demonstration. Then, we'll drive to a hut, where we'll meet up with the

local *ama*, “sea women.” These remarkable women free dive without a breathing apparatus for octopus, lobster, sea urchins, and other marine delicacies along the coast.

Afterwards, we’ll drive to a local *ama* hut for lunch.

**Lunch:** With the local *ama* in their diver hut, where we’ll have the opportunity to taste the seafood the divers caught that day and discuss their profession and lifestyle.

**Afternoon:** The rest of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries. You can rest at the hotel or you may choose to visit Mikimoto Pearl Island, the birthplace of pearl farming. Here, you may visit the Pearl Museum to learn more about the local *ama*.

**Dinner:** At the hotel.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Or, you may wish to relax in a traditional Japanese *onsen* (hot spring).

### **Day 13 Toba • Train ride to Kyoto • Excursion to Nara • Visit Todaiji Temple**

- Destination: Kyoto
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dormy Inn Premium Kyoto Ekimae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast this morning, we’ll depart for the Toba train station. Our final destination today is the ancient city of Kyoto; however, we will make a stop along the way in the distinctive city of Nara, which was once the capital of Japan. Our train is headed for Yamato Yagi Station, from where we’ll drive to Nara.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Nara.

**Afternoon:** Following lunch, we’ll visit Nara’s famous Todaiji Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As we approach Todaiji Temple’s Daibutsu-den Hall, you will first be impressed by its massive size, as it is the largest wooden building in the world. It is also one of the major historic temples in Japan and contains valuable artifacts. Here, we’ll admire the Daibutsu—an impressive 52-foot Buddha statue. As we continue to explore Todaiji, we’ll likely notice another charming feature of its park area: its tame, free-roaming deer, which were traditionally regarded as the messengers of the Shinto god. If you want a close-up introduction to them, you can purchase *shika senbei* (special biscuits) to feed them, but be prepared to be very popular with these lovely creatures when you offer them food.

Later, we’ll drive to Kyoto and check in to our hotel. Afterwards, enjoy some free time to relax or explore Kyoto independently.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 14 Explore Kyoto • Traditional *maiko* demonstration • Explore Kinkakuji Temple • Visit Nishiki Market**

- Destination: Kyoto
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Dormy Inn Premium Kyoto Ekimae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we’ll enjoy a day of sightseeing in Kyoto—beginning first with a visit to Fushimi Inari Shrine, the head shrine of the Inari, which honors the spirits venerated in the Shinto religion. We’ll first drive to witness

the site's magnificent tunnel of an estimated 10,000 red torii gates. Then, we'll depart for a special lunch experience.

**Lunch:** We'll enjoy lunch today while also witnessing a traditional dance demonstration by a *maiko*, or apprentice geisha. Maiko begin their training between 15 and 20 years old. Like geishas, they don traditional kimonos and often have special talents, such as dancing, singing, or playing an instrument. After the maiko's performance, she'll share stories about her life and why she chose this profession, as well as answer any questions we may have.

**Afternoon:** Next, we'll visit Kinkakuji Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The striking architecture of Kinkakuji, also known as the Temple of the Golden Pavilion, dates from 1387, when it was built by the third shogun (military commander) of the Ashikaga Shogunate. The reflection of the pavilion on the water of the adjacent pond produces a one-of-a-kind world-famous view.

Afterwards, we'll head to Nishiki Market. Referred to as "Kyoto's Kitchen," this five-block-long row of shops and restaurants attracts locals and visitors alike with its fresh produce, seafood, cookware, and more. There, you'll have the opportunity to mingle with vendors and sample regional delicacies. After our tour you may return to the hotel with our Trip Experience Leader, or stay to enjoy more time to explore the market.

**Dinner:** On your own. Perhaps you want to try *yudofu* (simmered tofu). Kyoto tofu is renowned for its smooth, creamy texture and flavor. This dish is usually served with freshly sliced green onions, ground sesame seeds and soy sauce.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 15 Kyoto • Tenryuji Garden • Visit Arashiyama Bamboo Grove

- Destination: Kyoto
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dormy Inn Premium Kyoto Ekimae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll drive to the Arashiyama district, an area in western Kyoto famous for its scenic beauty and historic artifacts. Our discoveries today will begin with Tenryuji Garden, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This garden incorporates a fusion of several elements to achieve its zen atmosphere: white sand resembling a wave-like pattern, rocks and stones intentionally arranged around an iconic pond, and unparalleled views of Mt. Arashiyama and Mt. Kameyama. After strolling through the garden, we'll then spend some time exploring the nearby Arashiyama Bamboo Grove.

We'll continue on to the sprawling Nijo Castle Complex, whose grounds span nearly 70 acres and are home to multiple palaces, gardens, and water features. Among the most storied of its properties is Ninomaru Palace, which boasts "nightingale floors," wooden floorboards which were designed to chirp a birdlike noise if intruders entered.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** The rest of the afternoon is free to make independent discoveries. Perhaps you'd like to visit an *orinasukan*, or hand-weaving studio, where you can learn how *kimonos* are crafted. You may also check with your Trip Experience Leader for other activity ideas.

**Dinner:** A Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant, where we'll toast to all the discoveries we've made throughout our adventure.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy night views of the illuminated Kyoto Station.

### **Day 16 Return to U.S.**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport in Osaka for your flight home, or on to *Hiroshima: City of Peace* if you're taking our post-trip extension.

## **END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION**

### **3 nights in *Hiroshima: City of Peace***

**Day 1** Train to Hiroshima • Visit Peace Memorial Park

**Day 2** Hiroshima • Optional Iwakuni City and *sakurao* distillery tour

**Day 3** Hiroshima • Explore Miyajima • Visit Itsukushima Shinto Shrine

**Day 4** Hiroshima • Return to U.S.

## OPTIONAL TOURS

---

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

**Please note:** *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

### **Mount Fuji Discoveries**

(Day 10 \$300 per person)

Discover Kawaguchiko, the unique region surrounding Mount Fuji. First, arrive in Oshino, a small village in the Fuji Five Lake region, to visit Oshino Hakkai—a series of eight sparkling ponds. Fed by the snow melt of Mount Fuji, these ponds are famous for their crystal-clear water. As the snow melts and flows down the mountain's slopes, the water is naturally filtered through porous layers of lava rock, resulting in extremely fresh spring water held in high esteem by the locals.

During your visit, explore the Hannoki Bayashi Shiryokan—a small open-air museum that encircles Oshino Hakkai's largest pond. Exhibits includes a traditional farmhouse with a distinctive thatched roof. Inside, we'll find displays of traditional farming tools and household items, as well as samurai armor and weapons.

Later, experience Kubota Itchiku Art Museum, dedicated to the art of kimono. Its impressive collection features 104 kimono created over four decades by visionary Japanese artist Itchiku Kubota. Throughout his decades-long career—from the late 1970s to his death

in 2003—Kubota revived 16th-century kimono-making techniques and modernized them with his own distinctive style. We'll also witness Kubota's Mount Fuji and Oceans series which highlights the artist's sincere reverence for nature through two themes frequently found in Japanese art: iconic Mount Fuji and water in its many forms.

Finally, reach our last destination of the day, Oishi Park. This stop will be our grand finale, as Oishi Park offers spectacular views of the lake and Mount Fuji—san herself.

This full-day optional tour also includes lunch.

**Please note:** *Kubota Itchiku Art Museum is privately owned and may be closed with little notice. In the event we cannot visit the museum today, we will enjoy alternate activities this afternoon, including viewing traditional Japanese thatch houses and visiting Oishi Park & Fuji Mountain Museum.*

## PRE-TRIP

### Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar & the Gobi Desert

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

---

- » 9 nights accommodation
- » 21 meals—9 breakfasts, 8 lunches, and 4 dinners
- » 10 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

#### PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

---

*Wild and untamed, Mongolia is a deeply spiritual land of nomadic cultures and dreamy landscapes of snow-capped mountains, great swathes of grassy plains, and an ancient desert. Even today, Mongolia evokes a time when Genghis Khan and his warrior horsemen thundered across the steppe to establish the largest land empire the world has ever known. Discover Mongolia's diverse land and people, from the bustle of Ulaanbaatar to the vast expanse of the Gobi Desert, where you'll camp for three nights.*

##### **Day 1 Depart U.S.**

**Afternoon:** Depart today on your flight to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia via Seoul, South Korea.

##### **Day 2 Fly to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia via Seoul, South Korea**

Continue on to your final destination with a stop in Seoul, South Korea.

##### **Day 3 Arrive in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia via Seoul, South Korea**

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Morning/Afternoon:** Depending on your flight arrangements, arrive in Seoul for a brief layover and continue on to Mongolia. Upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer

to our hotel, where you'll meet our Mongolian Trip Experience Leader before settling in after a long journey.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** Free to relax at the hotel.

##### **Day 4 Explore Ulaanbaatar • Meet a female shaman**

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Free to explore as you'd like. Our Trip Experience Leader will lead two orientation walks through the neighborhood surrounding

our hotel today: One this morning, and one before dinner. If you're feeling rested, you may want to join the morning walk.

Built in 1838, Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia's largest and most important center of Buddhism. The capital city is situated on the banks of the mighty Tuul River and surrounded by holy mountains. The first capital of the modern Mongolian empire was founded in 1639 as a nomadic encampment. This ancient "city" of *gers* (traditional felt tents; also known as *yurts* in Russian) was moved to the present site of Ulaanbaatar in 1778. Today, UB (as Ulaanbaatar is commonly referred to) is a bustling metropolis of roughly 1.3 million people, where modern buildings vie with Mongolian *gers*.

Later, our Trip Experience Leader will conduct a Welcome Briefing at our hotel. During this briefing, we will introduce ourselves and review our itinerary in more detail, including any changes that may need to occur.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Afterwards, we'll drive to meet a female shaman. Based on animism and ancestor worship, shamanism has been practiced since 400 BC. It was the main religion of the Huns, from whom the Mongols descended, and is still widely practiced in Mongolia today. The shamaness will invite us into her prayer room, where we'll witness her altar, armor, and spirit offerings. We'll learn about her rituals and the evolution of Mongolian shamanism and have the chance to ask any questions we have.

**Dinner:** Dinner is on your own tonight. Perhaps you'll ask your Trip Experience Leader where you can find *huushuur* (deep fried meat pies). Or you may want to dine at the hotel.

**Evening:** On your own. You may want to go for a stroll to soak in Ulaanbaatar at night, or simply relax in your room.

## Day 5 Ulaanbaatar • Gandan Monastery • Visit cashmere factory

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll board a bus bound for Gandan Monastery. Completed in 1925 after more than 100 years of construction, the monastery is now one of the most important centers of Buddhism in Ulaanbaatar. In addition to housing more than 150 monks, it is also home to an 87-foot tall statue of Avalokiteśvara, a *bodhisattva* (person on the path to Buddhahood) who embodies compassion. During our visit, we'll meet a resident monk and learn why he chose monastic life.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll depart the restaurant and make our way to a nearby cashmere factory, where we'll learn about the production of this coveted fiber. For hundreds of years, people have harvested this material from cashmere and pashmina goats, using it to make yarn and textiles. During our visit at the factory, we'll observe the production process and have a chance to ask any questions we may have about this practice.

The remainder of the afternoon is yours to explore Ulaanbaatar as you please. If today's activities have whetted your appetite for Mongolian culture, perhaps you'll head to the National Museum of Mongolia.

**Dinner:** A Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** After dinner, if you're not quite ready to settle in for the night, feel free to break off from the group and explore independently.

## Day 6 Ulaanbaatar • Genghis Khan monument • Home-Hosted Lunch

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Our day begins with a visit to a rather remarkable tribute to Genghis Khan. In 2008, the people of Mongolia decided to honor their first emperor in a big way—by erecting a statue of him astride his horse that stands 131 feet high atop a 33-foot-high coliseum. The statue was built a little over an hour away from Ulaanbaatar, at the site where legend has it Genghis Khan found a golden horsewhip that inspired his future conquests. We'll spend some time exploring the statue—including visiting a small exhibition on the ground floor and climbing to the top of Khan's horse. We'll depart with bragging rights, having summited the world's largest equestrian statue.

**Lunch:** We'll arrive at the *ger* of a Kazakh family for a **Home-Hosted Lunch**. In addition to savoring authentic dishes like homemade noodles and meat dumplings, we'll also view some traditional costumes and have a conversation with the family about their lifestyle. And be sure to save room for dessert—you'll definitely want to try the sweet treat we prepare together.

**Afternoon:** We'll bid farewell to our hosts and return to our hotel. Upon arrival, the remainder of the afternoon is yours. After familiarizing yourself with Genghis Khan this morning, perhaps you'll want to visit the Winter Palace Museum of Bogd Khan, the ruler of the first independent Mongolian state.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend options for Mongolian, American, or international fare.

**Evening:** Free to spend as you'd like. You may want to retire early to prepare for our transfer to the Gobi Desert tomorrow.

## Day 7 Fly to the Gobi Desert

- Destination: Gobi Desert
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dream Gobi Camp or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's activities require an early wake up call around 4am. The overnight bag you bring for our 3-night stay in the Gobi is subject to standard security regulations and cannot exceed 33lbs. To reach our camp today, we'll drive approximately 1 hour over unpaved roads with no opportunities to stop.

**Early Morning:** We'll drive to the airport early this morning.

**Breakfast:** The hotel will provide us with a boxed breakfast to enjoy en route to the airport, upon arrival, or during our flight.

**Morning:** Our flight to the Gobi Desert is scheduled to depart Ulaanbaatar this morning. Covering much of southern Mongolia, the Gobi Desert is a region of semi-arid desert terrain that is dazzling in its variety—from rocky outcrops to barren stretches of seemingly endless, rolling gravel plains. It is the world's coldest and northernmost desert, as well as a great repository of dinosaur remains. Caravan routes have been crossing the Gobi since ancient times. When Marco Polo, seeking the fabled capital of the Kublai Khan, encountered this vast and unforgiving landscape in the 1270s, he proclaimed, "It consists entirely of mountains and sands and valleys. There is nothing at all to eat." But nomads—and wildlife—do survive here (and you will certainly be well-fed as we venture into this mysterious, otherworldly region).

We'll begin making our way to our camp upon arrival. It's also the last refuge of wild two-humped Bactrian camels and home to the rare snow leopard and desert-dwelling Gobi bear.

Then we'll check in to our desert camp. Depending on where we stay, our accommodations will likely be traditional *ger* tents with bathrooms attached. The remainder of the morning is yours.

**Lunch:** At camp.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll enjoy free time to rest after our early flight or venture out into our desert surroundings.

**Dinner:** At camp.

**Evening:** Yours to do as you please. Perhaps you'll enjoy the opportunity to stargaze in this vast, unspoiled wilderness.

## Day 8 Gobi Desert • Camel ride in the dunes • Flaming Cliffs

- Destination: Gobi Desert
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dream Gobi Camp or similar

**Breakfast:** At camp.

**Morning:** While only about 5% of the Gobi Desert is sand, we begin the day by exploring one of the few regions of the Gobi covered in dunes at Moltsoq Els. We'll depart camp and drive to the home of a nomadic family engaged in the breeding of Bactrian camels. We'll learn about Gobi nomads and their camels, asking any questions we may have. Then, you will get to hop aboard one of the twin-humped beasts for a ride into the sweeping desert sands of the mysterious Gobi Desert.

Later, we'll bid our hosts goodbye and drive to our next destination—lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll next visit an area of the Gobi Desert known as Bayanzag—more commonly referred to as the Flaming Cliffs. The region is famous as the location of the first nest of dinosaur eggs and other fossils found here by American paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews in the 1920s. It was also Andrews who nicknamed the site “Flaming Cliffs” for the surreal, glowing orange color of the surrounding rocks and cliffs. We'll enjoy light trekking among the Flaming Cliffs before driving back to our camp.

The remainder of the afternoon is free to explore on your own.

**Dinner:** At camp.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 9 Explore Yol Valley

- Destination: Gobi Desert
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dream Gobi Camp or similar

**Activity Note:** Today will feature an hour-long drive over dirt roads.

**Breakfast:** At camp.

**Morning:** Today we explore Yol Valley (also known as Vulture Valley). We'll board 4-wheel drive vehicles and travel across the Gobi Desert to the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains, entering this deep gorge in a Mongolian national park. First, we'll visit a small museum at the entrance to the protected zone, where we'll learn more about the petrified trees, flora, and fauna of the Gobi Desert. Then, we'll hike amid impressive mountain scenery to seek out the

area's endemic plants and local wildlife for ourselves, including the valley's namesake, the lammergeier vulture (*yol* in Mongolian).

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll then drive back to camp, where the rest of the afternoon is yours to enjoy free time to relax or explore independently at our camp.

**Dinner:** At camp.

**Evening:** You're free to embark on your own discoveries.

### **Day 10 Fly to Ulaanbaatar • Optional Mongolian Dinner & Musical Performance**

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's activities will require an early wake up call, as we will depart the hotel at 6:15am.

**Breakfast:** At camp.

**Morning:** Early this morning, we depart our camp and drive an hour to Gobi Airport, where we will catch our flight to Ulaanbaatar.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Ulaanbaatar.

**Afternoon:** We'll depart the restaurant and drive to our hotel. The rest of the day is free to explore on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

You may choose to join us for an optional Mongolian dinner and traditional musical performance. We will have the opportunity to ask the performers any questions you may

have—perhaps about their unique instruments, such as the stringed *morin khuur*, or traditional forms of singing like *höömij* (throat singing).

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Or, if you have chosen our optional tour, we'll drive back to the hotel after the performance.

### **Day 11 Ulaanbaatar • Controversial Topic: Mongolia's relationship with two superpowers: Russia and China • Child Protection and Development Center visit**

- Destination: Ulaanbaatar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Best Western Premier Tuushin Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll drive to Mongolia National University and meet with a local speaker who will talk about the **Controversial Topic** facing Mongolia's government as it works to maintain relationships with the two superpowers that flank the country on both sides—Russia and China. He or she will sit down with us and talk about the current issues facing Mongolia's government, which became a democratic country in the early 1990s, as it balances working alongside these powerful neighbors while also maintaining relationships with other developed countries around the world.

Then we'll set off to visit the Child Protection and Development Center of Mongolia. Founded in 2012, the center became an official NGO (Non-governmental Organization) in 2013 and continues to carry on their mission to address one major issue facing Mongolian children today—domestic abuse—by working to protect children against such violence. Today, it continues to provide a healthy and inspiring

environment for children who live in the Ger district—an area where both the poverty rate and crime are high. During our visit, we will have the chance to meet some of these children and join in their daily activities, such as learning English or playing music.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll head back to our hotel. The remainder of the day is free to make your own independent discoveries.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Evening:** Free to enjoy your evening however you like—seek suggestions from your Trip Experience Leader.

## **Day 12 Ulaanbaatar • Fly to Seoul, South Korea**

• Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** A boxed breakfast will be available from the hotel.

**Morning:** Early this morning, drive to the airport to catch our flight to Seoul. Upon arrival, you'll join the main trip, *South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines & Seaside Treasures*.

## **OPTIONAL TOUR**

---

### **Optional Mongolian Dinner & Musical Performance**

(Day 10 \$105 per person)

Join us for an evening of traditional Mongolian cuisine, followed by a live musical performance. Afterwards, we will have the opportunity to ask the performers any questions you may have—perhaps about their unique instruments, such as the stringed *morin khuur*, or traditional forms of singing like *höömij* (throat singing).

## PRE-TRIP

### Vietnam: Hanoi & Halong Bay Cruise

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

---

- » 5 nights accommodation
- » 10 meals—5 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

#### PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

---

Expand your Asian discoveries by starting your adventure early in Vietnam, a nation reborn. In addition to exploring the bustling capital of Hanoi and cruising amidst the emerald waters of Halong Bay, our small group size allows us to connect closely with local history and culture—whether we're challenging our perspective of the Vietnam war with a Communist veteran, or meeting the skilled artisans of a ceramic workshop.

##### Day 1 Depart U.S.

**Afternoon:** You depart today on your overnight flight from the U.S. to Seoul, South Korea. From there, you will transfer to Hanoi, Vietnam.

##### Day 2 Arrive in Seoul, South Korea • Fly to Hanoi, Vietnam

- Accommodations: Babylon Grand Hotel & Spa or similar

**Afternoon/Evening:** Depending on your specific flight itinerary, you will arrive in Seoul, South Korea sometime in the afternoon or evening. You will then take a connecting flight to Hanoi, Vietnam, where an O.A.T. representative will meet you and assist with your transfer to your hotel.

##### Day 3 Explore Hanoi • Water puppet demonstration

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Babylon Grand Hotel & Spa or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll meet with our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing in the hotel. During this briefing, we will review our itinerary in more detail, including any changes that may need to occur.

Then we'll set out together on an orientation walk around the hotel's vicinity. As you stroll, keep an eye out for locals going about their daily routines—you may spot artisans at work, locals in line for lunch at sizzling food stalls, and motorbikes zipping in and out of traffic.

**Lunch:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can point you in the right direction for whatever you're in the mood for, be that a bowl of hot *pho* or a plate of noodles.

**Afternoon:** The early afternoon will be on your own—you may rest in your room, or gather with your fellow travelers in the hotel to reflect on the morning's discoveries. Perhaps you'll want to set off and start exploring the Old Quarter on your own. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide recommendations for galleries, cafés, and more.

Then, we'll set off to a local home where we will meet a water puppet master. After watching traditional water puppets in action during a private show, we'll enjoy a hands-on demonstration on how to manipulate the puppets to make them move—an O.A.T.-exclusive experience. Then, our small group size gives us the unique opportunity to learn how these intricate puppets are made. In Vietnam, the art form of water puppetry continues to thrive at least 1,000 years after it originated with peasants in the Red River Delta of the north. Puppets are suspended over water and directed by puppet masters who must sit, semi-submerged, for hours at a time. The French used to call these puppets “the souls of the Vietnamese rice fields”—made of lacquered, water-resistant fig wood, they depict villagers, farm animals, dragons, and more.

**Dinner:** A Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** After we return to the hotel, the rest of the evening is on your own. Settle in with a drink at the bar, or ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations for entertainment or exploration.

## Day 4 Hanoi • Visit Bat Trang ceramic village

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Babylon Grand Hotel & Spa or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll travel to Bat Trang, a small village on the southeastern outskirts of Hanoi. Since the 14th century, Bat Trang has been known and celebrated for its signature ceramic pottery, crafted from rich white clay with precision and skill. Our small group size grants us access to a workshop, where generations of craftspeople have been perfecting their art for centuries. There, we will meet with an artist and their family. We'll learn about the artist's daily routine and the ceramics process, from forming the clay to painting the distinctive, intricate designs that have been coveted by customers for centuries. Then, we'll have the chance to practice making ceramic pieces. Afterwards, we'll walk among the locals and wander about town, making time to explore the colorful vases, bowls, flowerpots, and more within the village market.

During our time in the village, we'll also learn about Vietnam's land reform, a mid-20th-century movement that redistributed ownership of land from landlords to a state-run series of collective farms. As part of the movement, thousands of landlords (or those purported to be landlords) were killed—for those who survived, their places and roles within villages were forever altered. We'll learn about this controversial period of Vietnamese history through the eyes of two former landlords.

Then, we'll drive to Hanoi for lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll return to the hotel after lunch. The rest of the day is free for you to spend as you please. You may choose to relax at the hotel, or perhaps you'll join your Trip Experience Leader on a journey to Ba Dinh Square, a pivotal site in 20th-century Vietnamese history. It was here in September 1945 that Ho Chi Minh read Vietnam's Declaration of Independence, and it's here today that the national leader's body rests within a massive granite mausoleum to the complex where we'll view it from its exterior—taking in the sight of guards, flowers, and more. We'll also behold the One Pillar Pagoda, widely considered one of Vietnam's most iconic Buddhist temples. Built of wood atop a single, four-foot-wide stone pillar and designed to resemble a lotus flower, the temple's origins date back to the year 1049.

**Dinner:** On your own, with the freedom to seek out local cuisine or familiar American standards. In either case, your Trip Experience Leader will be ready with recommendations.

**Evening:** You're free to turn in early for the night, or make the most of your time in Hanoi with extra exploration. You may ask your Trip Experience Leader for their tips.

## **Day 5 Overland to Halong Bay • Meet a communist veteran**

- Destination: Halong
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Heritage Halong Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Today, our transfer from Hanoi to Halong Bay will involve a 4-hour bus ride over roads that may be bumpy or uneven at times.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll board a bus this morning for about a 4-hour ride east to Halong Bay, the "emerald bay of Vietnam" and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With clear waters and mountains draped in velvety cloaks of vegetation, it's little wonder that the bay has served as inspiration for generations of Vietnamese poets. We'll make a few stops along the way to break up our drive and stretch our legs.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll make a short drive to Binh Luc Thuy village, where we'll meet a communist soldier and Vietnam War veteran who fought at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. This veteran retains his communist ideologies but believes Vietnam's modern communist government has been corrupted. We'll spend some time with him to learn why he believes communism is the best, most advanced form of government, and to hear firsthand from him how Vietnam has veered away from its communist roots in recent years. This is a great chance to ask any questions you may have, both about what the Vietnam War was like on the other side, and about what life in a modern communist country is like today.

We'll bid farewell to our speaker and continue our overland journey to Halong where we'll check into our hotel. You'll have some free time to relax and settle in, or perhaps you'll choose to explore on your own. Go for a stroll along the waterfront, browse the colorful shops, or maybe even stop in at a karaoke bar—they are a perennial favorite with the locals.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** After we return to our hotel, the rest of your night is free.

## Day 6 Halong Bay Cruise

- Destination: Halong
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Heritage Halong Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** We'll be spending our day cruising aboard a wooden sailboat and exploring a cave, which features uneven surfaces.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll drive to the pier and board our vessel for the day—a traditional Vietnamese wooden boat—and set out on our cruise.

With its clear, emerald waters and mountains draped in velvety cloaks of vegetation, it's little wonder that Halong Bay has been the inspiration for generations of Vietnamese poets. Resting peacefully across the Gulf of Tonkin near the Chinese border, this region—whose name translates to “the bay of the descending dragon”—is dotted with more than 1,600 mountain islands, whose jagged profiles seem to rise out of nowhere.

Against the backdrop of innumerable caves, beaches, soaring cliffs, and grottoes, the Vietnamese go about their daily lives, fishing and harvesting, reaping the riches of the land and sea. Vietnamese fishermen nimbly navigate in lacquered and woven-wood *coracles*—lozenge-shaped, rudderless vessels that resemble an oversized tub. Oar-propelled fishing boats, or *sampans*, abound as well, many occupied by whole families.

**Lunch:** Onboard the boat.

**Afternoon:** Continue relaxing on our boat's sun deck. During our cruise, we'll stop to explore a cavernous grotto, and then drop anchor at an island pierced with surreal caves that we'll explore. The bay's caves are popular among

visitors and locals alike, as the stone formations seem to drip like candlewax from the ceiling or down the walls.

We'll return to the pier and disembark the boat. Our bus will be waiting to take you back to the hotel, or if you'd prefer, you may remain by the harbor to continue exploring. The rest of the day is free for your own discoveries.

**Dinner:** On your own. Being so close to the sea, Halong has exceptionally fresh seafood.

**Evening:** Free to do as you'd like, whether that's taking a nighttime stroll through the city or retiring early to your room to pack.

## Day 7 Fly to Seoul, South Korea & begin main trip

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Activity Note:** This day features an early wake-up call.

**Early Morning:** Rise early today and check out of the hotel. We'll then drive to the Halong airport.

**Breakfast:** A boxed breakfast will be available during your transfer.

**Morning:** We'll arrive at the Halong airport and check in for your early afternoon flight. You'll fly to Seoul to begin your *South Korea & Japan: Temples, Shrines & Seaside Treasures* adventure.

## POST-TRIP

### *Hiroshima: City of Peace*

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

---

- » Bullet train transfers from Kyoto to Hiroshima and Hiroshima to Osaka; limited express train to Kansai Airport
- » 3 nights accommodation
- » 6 meals—3 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 2 dinners
- » 3 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers (by public transportation)

#### POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

---

*Built on an island chain in the Ota River Delta, Hiroshima will always be remembered for the events of August 6, 1945. But in the years since, the city has rebuilt, grown, and created the Peace Memorial Park.*

##### **Day 1 Train to Hiroshima • Visit Peace Memorial Park**

- Destination: Hiroshima
- Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Oriental Hotel or similar

**Morning:** As our main journey ends, we'll drive to Kyoto train station, where we'll board a bullet train to Hiroshima. Upon arrival, we'll drive to our hotel, where we'll briefly drop off our bags before walking to our lunch spot for the day.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** This afternoon, we begin our tour of historic Hiroshima, rebuilt after the devastation of August 6, 1945, and now a thriving, healthy city. We'll first visit Peace Memorial Park, located near the very center of the area of the A-bomb blast, where you will see memorials commemorating the victims of that fearful day and the ruins of a building that was less than 600 feet from the detonation.

The famous A-Bomb Dome (Genbaku Dome) was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. The Peace Memorial Museum displays remnants of the bombing day and accounts of survivors, but in this park you will also see manifestations of the hope for world peace. At the Children's Peace Memorial, people from all over the world have placed folded paper cranes as offerings for harmony on our planet.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. Perhaps you'd like to visit Hiroshima Orizuru Tower, an observation deck offering dramatic views of the city.

## Day 2 Hiroshima • Optional Iwakuni City and sakurao distillery tour

- Destination: Hiroshima
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Oriental Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, enjoy exploring Hiroshima on your own, visiting sites that have particular interest for you, or learning more about the city. You can walk through the Hiroshima Castle on the Ota River delta, spend time in the Hiroshima Museum of Art, or simply relax at the Hiroshima Botanical Garden or Shukkeien Garden.

Or, perhaps you'd like to join us for an optional tour in Iwakuni City. Here we will discover a hilltop castle and historic bridge, and have the chance to visit an authentic Japanese *sakurao* distillery.

**Lunch:** On your own if you do not join the optional tour—consult with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions. For those who do join, lunch is provided at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** The afternoon is free for your own discoveries. For those on the tour, you'll visit a *sakurao* distillery to learn about the process of creating this uniquely Japanese gin from locally sourced ingredients found in Hiroshima.

Then, those who take the optional tour will board a bullet train back to Hiroshima. The remainder of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries.

**Dinner:** On your own. Check with your Trip Experience Leader if you'd like ideas.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 3 Hiroshima • Explore Miyajima • Visit Itsukushima Shinto Shrine

- Destination: Hiroshima
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Oriental Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, walk to the local train station, where we will depart for Miyajima-guchi. From there, we will board a ferry ride to Miyajima, an island once worshiped for its spirituality. Here, Mount Misen—whose primeval forests are home to wild monkeys and deer—climbs to more than 1,700 feet and overlooks the beautiful Seto Inland Sea.

Upon arrival, we'll walk to the iconic Itsukushima Shinto Shrine. We see firsthand the grandeur of the shrine, which was founded in AD 593 and is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is considered one of the finest examples in Japan of the unique Shinden architecture. The elegant inner shrine includes 37 buildings, while the outer shrine along the shoreline consists of 19 structures, all blending with the compelling natural beauty of the site.

**Lunch:** On your own. Consult with your Trip Experience Leader for ideas.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll ride back to Hiroshima via ferry and train. Upon arrival at our hotel, the rest of the afternoon is yours to make your own discoveries.

**Dinner:** A Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Free for your own final discoveries.

## Day 4 Hiroshima • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we transfer to the Hiroshima airport for our flight home this afternoon. We cross the International Date Line during flight, arriving back in the U.S. on the same day.

## OPTIONAL TOUR

---

### Iwakuni City and Sakurao Distillery

(Day 2 \$200 per person)

During this optional excursion, we'll set off for the small, historically-rich town of Iwakuni, known for its historic bridge and hilltop castle. We'll explore the town today and discover one of its most notable features—the Kintaikyo Bridge. The original bridge, built in the 17th century, was damaged in 1950 when a destructive typhoon hit Japan. A few years later, a new bridge was erected, but this time it was made to withstand natural disasters. After, we'll visit the White Snake Museum where we'll witness these serpents, which are a symbol of good fortune.

After an included lunch, we'll visit a nearby distillery to discover the process of making *sakurao*, a distinctly Japanese gin made from locally-sourced botanicals and citrus from Hiroshima. We'll also have the chance to sample some *sakurao* as well.

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

---

## Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

## Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

## Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip:** You will need 3 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Mongolia:** You will need an additional passport page, for a total of 4.
- **Pre-trip extension to Vietnam:** You will need 2 additional passport pages, for a total of 5.
- **Post-trip extension to Hiroshima:** No additional passport pages needed.

*Please note: You might not use all of these pages on your adventure (when you return, some may still be blank) but local officials will want to see that you have them.*

## Visas Required

**We’ll be sending you a detailed Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure.** In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This information is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **South Korea and Japan: No visa required.** For U.S. citizens, a visa is not required for stays of up to 90 days.

- **Mongolia (pre-trip extension only): No visa required.** For U.S. citizens, a visa is not required for stays of up to 90 days.
- **Vietnam (pre-trip extension only): Visa required. Can only be obtained in advance.** You must obtain your visa for Vietnam before you leave home; it cannot be obtained on arrival.

### Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **[www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org)**.

### Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

### Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

### Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency). If applicable, you will receive a list of these fees with your Final Documents.

## RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

---

### Is This Adventure Right for You?

**Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.** We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

#### PACING

- 4 locations in 15 days
- 1 pre-dawn departure

#### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids
- Must be able to walk 3-6 miles unassisted each day and participate in 3-5 hours of daily physical activities, including scaling several steep steps without handrails
- Luggage porters are unavailable at hotels and on trains—you must be able to carry your own bags
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals.

#### CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures are typically between 50-60°F in early spring, 85-95°F in summer, and 50-70°F in fall

#### TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy roads, by bus and on foot
- Travel via bus commuter train and bullet train, taxi, ferry, small boat, motorcoach, and subway
- Several long overland drives of 3-5 hours

#### ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- Asian squat-style toilets must be used in some villages without other facilities; and travelers may experience pit-latrines while on the Mongolia trip extension

- Because Japan is becoming a very popular destination for solo travelers, please be aware that single hotel rooms in Japan tend to be notably smaller than those in the U.S., and don't always feature closets.
- Some hotels and restaurants in Japan still have designated areas for smoking. While O.A.T. strives to provide our travelers with non-smoking hotel rooms at all times and works with local restaurants to limit smoking while our groups are present, please note that you may encounter cigarette smoke odor during your visit to Japan.

## **CUISINE**

- Meals will be based on the local cuisine; Western food is limited

## **Steps to Take Before Your Trip**

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel) or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

## **No Vaccines Required**

### **Recommended Vaccines**

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

### **Medication Suggestions**

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Optional for the Mongolia extension: Pain medication to be used in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location, such as the Gobi Desert.

### **Traveling with Medications**

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

### Bringing Medications to Japan

At time of writing, the U.S. Embassy in Japan had instructions about bringing medications into Japan on their website, <http://jp.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/doctors/importing-medications>. We encourage you to read the entire post online, but here are the key points:

- You can generally bring up to one month’s supply of prescription medicine into Japan, and up to two months’ supply of over-the-counter medications
- Some over-the-counter medicines commonly used in the United States are illegal in Japan, including inhalers, plus some allergy and sinus medications. Specifically, products that contain stimulants (medicines that contain pseudoephedrine, such as Actifed, Sudafed, and Vicks inhalers) or codeine are prohibited.
- For prescription medications, you must bring a copy of your doctor’s prescription as well as a letter stating the purpose of the drug. However, some U.S. prescription medications (such as Adderall) cannot be brought into Japan, even with a copy of the prescription. *Note: You may not be asked for a copy of your prescription, but if it is requested you must be able to provide one. Failure to provide a copy of prescriptions upon request could result in detainment.*
- For more information on whether or not you will be allowed to bring the particular medication into Japan, you could consult the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare website at [www.mhlw.go.jp/english/index.html](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/index.html). *NOTE: We only recommend that you take this step if the medication is vital to you. If you don’t care that the medication might be confiscated, then it is not worth the effort.*

### Bringing Medications to South Korea

At time of writing, the State Department had detailed instructions about bringing medications into South Korea. We encourage you to read the entire post online, but here are the key points:

- Prescription medications containing narcotics and/or amphetamines are not permitted without submitting a written application to the Narcotics Control Division of the Korean Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) before traveling. Over-the-counter amphetamines are illegal to bring into South Korea.
- For prescription medications not containing narcotics or amphetamines, travelers are allowed to bring up to six bottles of medication (a three month supply) for personal use. All medications must be accompanied by the original prescriptions, a letter from your doctor specifying the medical condition being treated with the prescriptions, and a statement from your doctor listing the medications that you will be bringing into South Korea.

- For more information on whether or not you will be allowed to bring the particular medication into South Korea, you could consult the U.S. Embassy Seoul website at <http://kr.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/doctors/>.

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

### Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

### Special Meal Requests

If you have a dietary preference (i.e. Atkins diet, low-salt, etc.) or a religious diet, please let us know at least 30 days prior to your departure. Keep in mind that these types of **special meal requests are not guaranteed**—especially in Japan where most restaurants do not offer them due to cultural differences. For example, MSG, gluten, and fish broth are very common ingredients here; it may not be possible to avoid them entirely. Due to these cultural differences, special meal requests may be very simple and limited in variety, such as meat, fish, and vegetables that are boiled or steamed without seasonings. You may consider bringing supplementary snacks or seasonings for your personal use.

### Water

- Tap water in South Korea and Japan is safe to drink. If you prefer bottled water, it is readily available for purchase. Another alternative is to bring a reusable water bottle from home.

- In the pre-trip extensions, tap water is not safe to drink in either Mongolia or Vietnam. We recommend that you stick to filtered, boiled, or bottled water while in these countries.

## Food

- In general, food safety standards in South Korea and Japan are very high. Use the same basic precautions that you would at home and you should be fine.
- On the pre-trip extensions in Mongolia or Vietnam, you should take more precautions by avoiding salad or fruit that might be washed in local tap water.
- Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for any meals you take on your own.

# MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

---

## Top Three Tips

- **Bring a mixture of different payment methods**—some cash and a couple of different cards—so that you'll be prepared for any situation. However, traveler's checks are not recommended as they can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high.
- **Be prepared to try more than one ATM.** Occasionally local ATMs will not work with certain cards. For example, there was temporary stop on MasterCards at 7-Eleven ATMs in Japan a few years ago. So you may need to try more than one machine or try a different card.
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.

## Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like [www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter), your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

**Japan:** Japanese Yen (¥)

**South Korea:** Korean Won (₩)

**Mongolia:** Tugrik (₮)

**Vietnam:** Vietnamese dong (₫)

## How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets.

During the trip, the easiest way to get local currency is to use a local ATM (your bank at home will convert and charge you in U.S. dollars). You can also exchange cash at some hotels and money exchange offices. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). Never exchange money on the street.

All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

## ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card.

Many banks charge a fee of \$1–\$10 each time you use a foreign ATM. Others may charge you a percentage of the amount you withdraw. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart.

Lastly, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM.

**Japan:** ATMs are common, but not every ATM will take a U.S. card. Your best bet is to try a Post Office ATM or Seven Bank ATM (usually found inside 7–Eleven convenience stores). Both Post Office and Seven Bank ATM will display stickers that indicate what cards they accept. However, please note that using a credit card in an ATM for a cash advance may or may not work—even if the ATM has credit card logos.

**South Korea:** ATMs are very common. Look for ATMs listed as a “Global ATM” as they accept international cards.

**Mongolia:** ATMs are really only available in large cities like Ulaanbaatar. But even in Ulaanbaatar, the ATMs that are available may not accept your card; you may need to try more than one before you can withdraw money. For these reasons, you should NOT expect to rely on ATMs the way you might in the U.S. or in Europe. It is probably more practical to bring a reserve of cash for daily expenses and view the ATM as a backup. Another option is to bring enough cash to get part way through the trip, and then plan on making one large withdrawal in Ulaanbaatar to cover the rest of the trip.

**Vietnam:** ATMs are fairly common in Vietnam. Occasionally travelers report having to try more than one bank to find an ATM that works with their U.S.-based card.

## Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. Even if you don't plan on using a credit card during your trip, we still suggest that you bring one or two as a backup, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, because not every shop will take every card. For example, although Discover and American Express cards are accepted in some countries outside the U.S., they are not widely adopted, so other brands will work at a much larger range of stores, restaurants, etc.

If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

**Japan:** Credit cards can be used at department stores, hotels, and businesses that cater to tourists, but most other shops and restaurants will want cash.

**South Korea:** Credit cards are common but may not be accepted by street vendors or at small restaurants.

**Mongolia:** Credit card use is becoming more common in Mongolia, especially in Ulaanbaatar, but not in the countryside. Many businesses, shops, and restaurants are still “cash only”. Therefore a credit card will be useful in some situations, but not all, which is why bringing a cash reserve for daily expenses is recommended. Businesses that do take credit cards will often charge a fee to do so; ask before making your purchase.

**Vietnam:** Credit cards are commonly accepted. However, some businesses in Vietnam do not accept them, so you should carry some cash on you.

### Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don’t assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don’t work outside of the U.S.!

## Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8-\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Housekeepers:** Tipping at hotels is not commonplace in Japan or South Korea, and some hotels have trained their staff to decline tips. If you really want to reward exceptional service, ask your Trip Experience Leader for advice.
- **Waiters and Taxis:** Tipping is not customary or expected in Japan or South Korea.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

*Please note: For your convenience, tips to O.A.T. staff can be paid in U.S. dollars or local currency. Please do not use personal or traveler’s checks for tips.*

## AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

---

### Land Only Travelers & Personalized Air

#### Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Personalization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Personalization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our Personalization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Personalization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner) under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

### Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **U.S. Departure:** If you are among a group of ten or more travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, it is our goal to have an O.A.T. Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time. If you are flying domestically before your international flight, the representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.
- **U.S. Return:** If you are among a group of ten or more travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, an O.A.T. Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have our Representative waiting to assist your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

**If you are taking the optional post-trip extension to Hiroshima** and have made your own air arrangements, your return airport transfer to the Hiroshima Airport (HIJ) will be included if you are departing the same day as the group. You will need to arrange your own transportation if you are staying on your own after the conclusion of the post-trip.

### **Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased**

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: [www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com)

### **Optional Tours**

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

### **What You Need to Know**

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.

- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner)).

## **Communicating with Home from Abroad**

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

### **Cell Phones**

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

### **Calling Apps**

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype or FaceTime. These services are usually less expensive than making a traditional call, but you'll need a Wi-Fi connection and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

### **Calling Cards & 1-800 Numbers**

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.). One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

**Japan:** +81

**Mongolia:** +976

**South Korea:** +82

**Vietnam:** +84

## PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

### Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	<b>Varies by international airline.</b> The current industry standard is 50 lbs for checked luggage and 15 lbs for carry-ons.
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches.
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. A model with wheels is strongly recommended.

TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS
<b>Extensions in Vietnam or Japan:</b> Same as the main trip.
<b>Mongolia pre-trip extension:</b> Some of our flights limit the <i>combined</i> weight of checked bag and carry-on bags to <b>33 lbs TOTAL</b> . You may bring up to 65 lbs total <i>if</i> using hotel's left-luggage service.

REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS
<p><b>An additional small bag is a necessity for certain portions of your main trip.</b> You'll need it for those times when luggage storage is so limited that we must send some luggage ahead. This smaller bag can be a duffel, a backpack, a weekend bag—whatever you feel comfortable with. It only needs to hold enough gear for 2-3 nights at most. For more details, see the “Your Luggage” section.</p> <p><b>Luggage limits in Mongolia:</b> Out flights to/from the Gobi have very strict luggage limits—33 lbs TOTAL, all luggage added together. However, your flights between South Korea and Mongolia have a larger limit—65 lbs total. This means you may bring up to 65 lbs worth of luggage on the extension, but you but if you do, you must leave the extra luggage behind at the hotel in Ulaanbaatar while in the Gobi. Bring an additional bag as described above (which you will also need for the main trip).</p> <p><b>Luggage rules:</b> Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>

## Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

## Your Luggage

### **A small bag is a necessity for certain portions of your trip.**

There will be one occasion on the main trip and one occasion on the optional post-trip extension when your main luggage (your suitcase or large duffel bag) will be sent ahead because of the limited luggage space on the trains in Japan. During these times you won't have access to your main luggage, so you'll need to use a smaller bag instead. This smaller bag can be a duffel, a backpack, a weekend bag – whatever you feel comfortable with. It only needs to hold enough gear for 2-3 nights at most. Many travelers will simply re-purpose the bag they used as a carry-on during their flight. Or you could pack the smaller bag into your suitcase or big duffel.

*TIP: For both your main luggage and smaller bag, you might want to consider a model with wheels. While O.A.T. will provide for porter services when available, more often than not this service is not offered in South Korea and Japan. There is no porter service at the airport and train stations, and most of the hotels do not offer porter service either. For that reason we suggest you bring only the amount of baggage that you feel comfortable handling yourself and we strongly suggest luggage with built-in wheels.*

This small bag is also important for the pre-trip extension in Mongolia as a work-around for the strict weight limits on our the flights to/from the Gobi.

## Locks

For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

## Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. Laundromats are not readily available outside of residential areas. Some of the hotels you visit may have laundry services. However, it is recommended that you pack as if

you will be hand washing all your items. Look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. We recommend you wear sturdy walking shoes or similar supportive sports shoes that offer good traction. You may want to consider taking shoes that don't have laces, as you will be asked to take your shoes off in a number of the places, such as at shrines and castles and during the home-hosted visit. In the winter it can be very cold, even indoors to walk on these floors. We suggest you bring some thick, insulated socks.

### Visiting the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone)

Plan to dress modestly when visiting the DMZ as there are strict guidelines in place. We recommend that you wear long pants (either khakis or clean jeans with no rips/tears) and a long-sleeved shirt with close-toed shoes. The following clothing items are prohibited when visiting the DMZ:

- T-shirts, tank tops, sleeveless shirts, shirts with anything deemed to be insulting or provocative, and sweatshirts
- Shorts and short skirts
- Workout or exercise clothing
- Open-toed shoes, sandals, and flip flops
- Military clothing
- Oversize or baggy clothing
- Anything deemed to be "biker attire", including leather vests, jackets, etc.

### Style Hints

Dress on our trip is functional and casual. Wearing shorts is acceptable in most situations for both men and women. There is no strict dress code (except at the DMZ), but when visiting temples or shrines local people would appreciate it if you dressed neatly and modestly.

### Suggested Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) and consulting the "Climate" chapter of this handbook.

**And don't forget a reusable water bottle**—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

## Recommended Clothing

- Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts.
- Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting is best. Avoid tight-fitting jeans for comfort and ease of movement.
- Walking shorts: Cut long for modesty
- For women—1 or 2 travel skirts: Our female Trip Experience Leaders suggest that a skirt is especially convenient when using Asian-style squat toilets.
- Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking or running shoes. Shoes that can be slipped on, or lace-free shoes are recommended because you will need to remove your shoes often in temples and holy sites. Because it is very common to removed shoes at temples, you may wish to bring extra “temple socks”. If traveling in the winter we suggest you bring thick, insulated socks as some temples are not heated and the floor will be cold.
- Wide-brim sun hat or visor for sun protection
- Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- Light cotton or wool sweater as motorcoach air conditioning can be cold
- Underwear and sleepwear

## Essential Items

- Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Hotels will provide soap and shampoo, but usually not provide a washcloths.
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lens; sunglasses
- Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- Insect repellent
- Light folding umbrella
- Moisturizer and sun-blocking chapstick
- Pocket-size tissues
- Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser

- Plug adapters and electrical transformer: see “A Word About Electricity” for details.
- Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- Overnight bag good for 3 nights’ worth of clothing/gear

## Medicines & First Aid Gear

*IMPORTANT TIP: At time of writing, the State Department had detailed instructions about bringing medications into South Korea and Japan. We encourage you to check their website at <http://travel.state.gov> and search “Medications and South Korea” and “Medications and Japan”.*

- Your own prescription medicines
- Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- Optional: An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness

## Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts’ generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

## Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

### Voltage

Electricity in South Korea and Mongolia is 220 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220. But you should check the item or the owner’s guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Electricity in Japan is 100 volts. The types of things a traveler will want to plug in can run off both 100 and 110, but they might be a little slower or may take a little longer to charge in Japan.

## Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs on this adventure, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

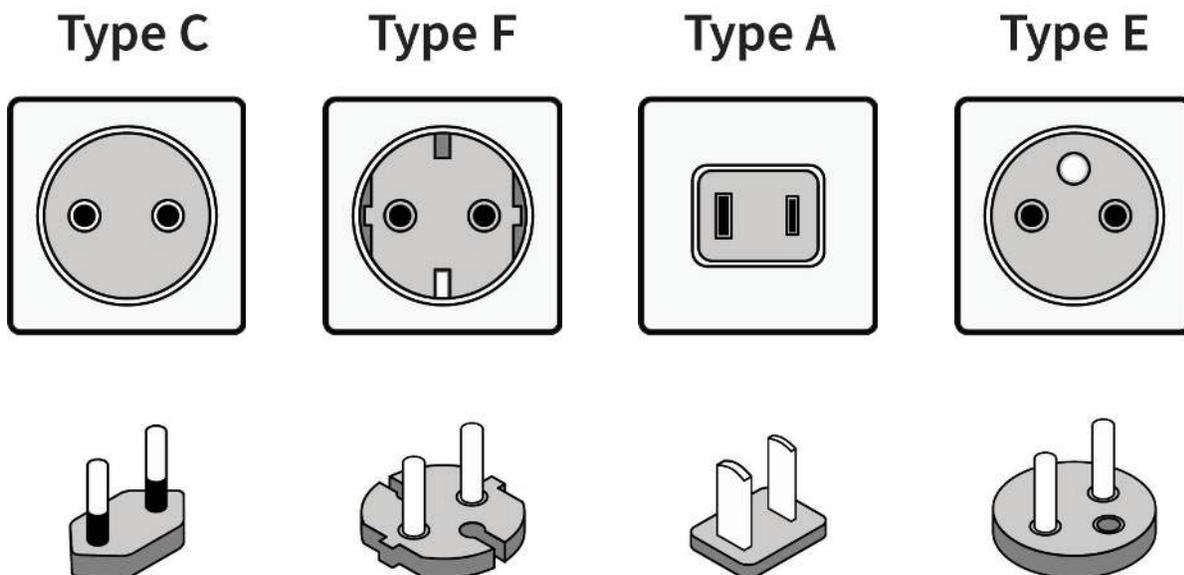
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

**Japan:** A (same at the U.S.)

**South Korea:** C and F

**Mongolia:** C or E (Note: C plugs will fit in E sockets)

**Vietnam:** A (same as the U.S.), C, or G



**Availability**

Barring the occasional and unpredictable power outage, electricity is as readily available on this adventure as it is in the U.S.

## CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

---

**South Korea:** The climate in South Korea is temperate and is characterized by four distinct seasons, similar to the east coast of the United States. Spring and autumn are temperate, offering mild temperatures and little rainfall. The warm spring weather coaxes flowers into bloom, creating colorful landscapes. Autumn brings cooler weather and brilliant clear blue skies perfectly juxtaposed against the orange and red foliage. The summer months bring a hot and humid climate, peaking from late July to late August. The majority of South Korea's annual rainfall also occurs during the summer months. The summer months yield bountiful fresh fruits and vegetables and leave the mountains covered in luscious green. Although South Korea does not experience typhoons on the same scale as Southeast Asia, typically one to three typhoons hit South Korea each year. The typhoon season runs from June to September. Winters are the longest season with cold and dry weather typically in the 20s and 30s. Snow topped mountains are a common sight, though it does not often snow in the plains. A phenomenon known as samhansaon occurs during the winter—a seven-day cycle during which the region experiences three cold days followed by four milder days.

**Japan:** Most of Japan lies in a temperate zone with weather conditions similar to the east coast of the United States. The four distinct seasons play a significant role in Japanese culture, with festivals, religious sites, dress, and even table settings all linked to the changing of seasons. Spring can be very unpredictable and temperatures often fluctuate, and the plum and cherry blossoms touch the entire landscape with splashes of whites and pinks. June and July bring the summer rains, which can be quite heavy at times, along with temperatures in the 80s and some humidity. Weather during September can be briefly turbulent, with some fast-moving thunderstorms inland and occasional typhoons over the ocean. The rest of autumn is spectacular, with slightly cool days, clear blue skies, and stunning foliage. Winter days are chilly but temperatures don't often drop below freezing. Snow falls most abundantly in the northern part of the country and along the coast of the Sea of Japan, making skiing a favorite means of enjoying the winter landscape. Please bring with warm clothing.

**Mongolia:** Mongolia's climate can be summed up in a few words: cold, dry, and windy (winter) or hot, dry, and windy (summer). Of course there are seasons when the temperatures vary, rain falls, and the wind stops, but since the country is completely landlocked, there is no nearby ocean to moderate the seasons. The result is a dramatic climate largely influenced by Mongolia's two main topographical features—its mountains and its deserts.

Mongolia is a four-season country. Spring is usually mid- or late-March through May. Summer runs until August. Fall is brief—September and October—with winter sometimes starting at the end of October, and sometimes holding out until November. Winter's arrival depends on your location; just like in the U.S., it arrives earlier in the north and in the mountains.

Spring can be a tough season to predict because the weather is so changeable (freak snowstorms have been known to occur as late as May). Summer is the warmest time of year, with average highs in the 70s, but the Gobi Desert can hit 100°F and Ulaanbaatar can sometimes get up to the low 90s. Despite these high daytime temperatures, keep in mind that even in July and August,

the nighttime lows can be a chilly 40°, especially in the mountains. Summer is also usually the rainiest season, bringing color and life to the steppes. Many parts of the country experience long daylight hours in the summer—in Ulaanbaatar sunset can be as late as 9 or 10 pm. Fall brings moderate temperatures and, in the north, changing colors on the trees. Winter is very cold, with frost and snow almost everywhere—even in the Gobi Desert.

**Northern Vietnam:** The climate in this region is cooler than the rest of the country. Summertime highs are usually in the 70s, although it can get hotter. But it’s winter that surprises most travelers. From December–March the low temperatures can be in the 40s and the daytime high might only be in the 50s. So if you’re traveling during these months, be sure to bring some warm clothing and/or clothing you can layer.

### Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

## Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA			TOKYO, JAPAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
<b>JAN</b>	33 to 21	72 to 52	1.0	48 to 35	61 to 46	2.0
<b>FEB</b>	38 to 25	72 to 50	1.4	49 to 36	63 to 49	2.8
<b>MAR</b>	49 to 35	74 to 47	2.2	54 to 41	69 to 55	4.2
<b>APR</b>	62 to 46	75 to 46	3.0	64 to 50	76 to 60	5.1
<b>MAY</b>	72 to 55	80 to 50	4.5	72 to 58	79 to 61	5.7
<b>JUN</b>	79 to 64	85 to 58	6.8	76 to 66	87 to 71	6.9
<b>JUL</b>	82 to 71	90 to 70	18.0	82 to 71	89 to 72	5.3
<b>AUG</b>	84 to 72	87 to 66	7.2	86 to 75	87 to 68	5.8
<b>SEP</b>	77 to 63	85 to 56	7.2	79 to 69	85 to 69	8.5
<b>OCT</b>	66 to 51	81 to 49	2.4	69 to 58	78 to 64	7.6
<b>NOV</b>	51 to 38	76 to 51	2.4	61 to 49	72 to 58	3.8
<b>DEC</b>	38 to 27	74 to 54	1.0	53 to 40	65 to 50	2.1

MONTH	KYOTO, JAPAN			HIROSHIMA, JAPAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
<b>JAN</b>	46 to 30	70	2.2	47 to 35	78 to 53	1.9
<b>FEB</b>	48 to 32	65	2.6	48 to 35	79 to 54	2.6
<b>MAR</b>	53 to 33	60	4.3	54 to 40	79 to 55	4.2
<b>APR</b>	66 to 44	60	5.9	64 to 49	78 to 55	6.5
<b>MAY</b>	73 to 51	65	5.7	71 to 57	81 to 58	6.1
<b>JUN</b>	80 to 60	70	9.2	77 to 66	86 to 68	10.0
<b>JUL</b>	87 to 69	70	8.0	84 to 74	88 to 70	9.1
<b>AUG</b>	89 to 71	70	5.8	87 to 75	85 to 65	4.3
<b>SEP</b>	82 to 64	70	7.9	80 to 68	85 to 65	7.5
<b>OCT</b>	71 to 51	70	5.0	71 to 57	82 to 57	4.2
<b>NOV</b>	60 to 41	70	3.2	61 to 47	82 to 55	2.6
<b>DEC</b>	51 to 32	70	2.1	52 to 39	80 to 54	1.8

MONTH	ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA			HANOI, VIETNAM		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
<b>JAN</b>	3 to -13	83 to 71	0.1	66 to 59	85	0.8
<b>FEB</b>	12 to -8	81 to 65	0.2	66 to 59	85	1.1
<b>MAR</b>	27 to 6	74 to 50	0.2	73 to 64	90	1.8
<b>APR</b>	44 to 23	66 to 40	0.5	79 to 70	90	3.6
<b>MAY</b>	59 to 37	64 to 37	0.9	88 to 75	85	7.2
<b>JUN</b>	68 to 48	73 to 43	2.5	90 to 77	85	9.0
<b>JUL</b>	71 to 53	78 to 50	3.1	90 to 79	85	10.1
<b>AUG</b>	68 to 50	80 to 49	3.3	90 to 79	90	11.7
<b>SEP</b>	58 to 38	76 to 44	1.6	88 to 77	85	9.9
<b>OCT</b>	43 to 23	75 to 48	0.5	82 to 72	80	5.8
<b>NOV</b>	21 to 3	79 to 60	0.3	75 to 66	80	1.8
<b>DEC</b>	7 to -8	83 to 72	0.1	70 to 59	80	0.5

## ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

---

### O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

### South Korean and Japanese Culture

South Korea and Japan share the same cultural heritage. Korean civilization, and the transmission of Chinese culture through Korea, had a large influence on Japan. To many westerners, Japanese and South Korean culture is mystifying. Perhaps because of the contradictory nature of South Korean and Japanese cultures themselves—both are rooted in traditions that date back thousands of years while also being in a rapid state of flux, laser focused on the latest technological developments, shifting fads, and fashion trends. All true, which makes South Korea and Japan such a fascinating region of the world to explore.

Both nations experienced an isolationist period. In Japan, a series of military shoguns controlled the country for several centuries, beginning a 200-year period of isolation that lasted until 1868, when emperors returned and began modernization. Following the devastation of the Second World War, Japan quickly rose from the ashes to achieve remarkable growth—holding the title of the world's second largest economy for more than 40 years. Until recently, Korea, once known as the “Hermit Kingdom” to westerners, was even more insular and less cosmopolitan than Japan. However, from large numbers of Koreans studying abroad and language ability increasing to Korean businesses becoming global giants, the last four decades have marked a rapid transformation for South Korea.

As guests in any foreign land, having an awareness of local manners and customs—and following them—not only shows respect but bridges the cultural divide and enriches your travel experience. There are subtleties to South Korean and Japanese culture and complex rules of etiquette that foreign guests are not expected to know—and perhaps we could never know them. But there are a few simple things to keep in mind about South Korea and Japan if you'd like to avoid a cultural faux pas.

An obvious social convention in South Korea and Japan is bowing. Everyone seems to bow at every occasion—hello, goodbye, sorry, thank you, and hundreds more. There are even different degrees of bowing (a 30-degree bow means this, a 45-degree bow means that). And when someone bows as a sign of respect—like the staff as you enter a store, a return bow is not expected. It's all very complicated, but when you meet someone, a little bow from you is always nice. And it is customary to remove your footwear when entering a South Korean or Japanese home, temple,

traditional guesthouse (ryokan), and sometimes even restaurants. When in doubt, just look around. If there are small entryways, respectively called *genkan* and *hyeon gwan*, with a pile of shoes, you should probably remove yours.

In both cultures, it's also considered rude to walk down the street while snacking. That's why when you see people milling around at vending machines or street stalls—they're eating or drinking whatever they just purchased before they leave. And if you're having drinks with a few people, it's polite to refill someone else's glass rather than your own. If you don't want another drink, just leave your glass full. In Japan, when you're in a restaurant, try to remember not to put your chopsticks into your bowl of rice or to use them to pass food to someone else—it's considered bad manners, and also reminds the Japanese of a ceremony performed at a funeral. In South Korea, given the massive importance of family and your elders, the eldest person should be served first at the table. Everyone seated should then wait for them to begin eating before doing so. And strange as it seems for two nations that follow such strict rules of etiquette, slurping noodles or soups is not just acceptable, it's encouraged!

### **Religion in South Korea and Japan**

Religions practiced in South Korea and Japan are diverse. Korea's most popular religion is Christianity (29.4%), followed by Buddhism (22.9%), and then Shamanism (3%). Churches with visible crosses can be seen throughout the country, and the steeple seems to be a permanent fixture in all Korean city skylines. However, historically Koreans have lived under the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism. These traditional Asian philosophies are not always considered religions by Korean people, but rather as a way of viewing life. The tenets and values of these belief systems still have a strong influence on societal behaviors and practices.

Religion in Japan is a belief system rooted in the ideas of Shintoism and Buddhism and intertwined with everyday life and culture. Shintoism is Japan's indigenous belief system which is concerned with the spirituality of all things in nature. Buddhism arrived in Japan from China and other Asian countries in the sixth century. The two systems are able to coexist in Japan since the focus of Shintoism is on the spirituality of the living world—or life—and Buddhism is more focused on the soul, or the afterlife. In general, the shrines you see in Japan are Shinto, and the temples are Buddhist.

Early in the 20th century, religious beliefs in Japan centered around their Emperor as a living god—with the entire nation united as one big family. But after the crushing defeat of World War II, Japanese society became increasingly secularized. Today, Japanese religious beliefs are more personal, centering around their own family. While religious rituals accompany births, marriages, deaths, and certain festivals, most Japanese do not worship regularly or even consider themselves particularly religious. And as a nation, Japan is very tolerant of other religions—up to 10% of Japan's people practice Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, or new religious movements like *shin shukyo*.

## Accommodations

During our time in Japan, we'll stay for two nights in a *ryokan*, or Japanese-style inn. While these inns feature many modern amenities (TV, Internet service, etc.), the bedding in most is purely traditional—futon-style mattresses on the floor without a bed frame. Occasionally the *ryokan* might be able to arrange a Western-style bed. But this is not guaranteed, and depending on the *ryokan*, it may incur a fee that you would be responsible for paying directly to the inn. If you would like to request a Western-style bed, please let your Trip Experience Leader know and he or she will check on availability and pricing.

**Japan in general:** Please be aware that single hotel rooms in Japan (i.e. a room for one traveler only) tend to be notably smaller than those in the U.S., and don't always feature closets. Also, some hotels and restaurants in Japan still have designated areas for smoking. While O.A.T. strives to provide our travelers with non-smoking hotel rooms at all times (and works with local restaurants to limit smoking while our groups are present), you may encounter cigarette smoke odor during your visit to Japan.

## Special Meal Requests

Our meals will be based on the local cuisine. Western foods will be available at breakfast and some lunches, but otherwise we will experience the foods of South Korea and Japan. If you have a special meal request, we will do everything possible to assist but **special meal requests are not guaranteed**—especially in Japan where most restaurants do not offer them due to cultural differences. For example, MSG, gluten, and fish broth are very common ingredients here; it may not be possible to avoid them entirely. Due to these cultural differences, special meal requests may be very simple and limited in variety, such as meat, fish, and vegetables that are boiled or steamed without seasonings. You may consider bringing supplementary snacks or seasonings for your personal use.

## Language Barrier

You can have some great “conversations” with local people who do not speak English, even if you don't speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling. Keep in mind, however, that it is always good form to know at least a few words in the local language.

## Taking Photographs

The etiquette of photographing most people in the countries on your itinerary is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. Be especially polite if you want to photograph an older woman. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject, try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK. Your Trip Experience Leader can help.

## Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don't be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people.

Carry a one-day supply of cash in your pocket. Carry most of your money, and your passport, in a travel pouch or money belt under your shirt. Replenish your pocket supply when you are in a safe and quiet place, or in our vehicle. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room. Most hotels will offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe (for which you can set your own personal number). Please utilize them.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful. Con artists sometimes target travelers.

## Naadam Festival in Mongolia

The Naadam Festival is a public holiday that takes place annually from July 11-15. Known as "the three manly games," this festival features wrestling, archery, and horse racing. While the most of the main events (such as the opening and closing ceremonies) are typically held in or around Ulaanbaatar on July 11-13, there are many smaller events held during the 5 day festival throughout the country. For more details and information, visit <http://naadamfestival.com/>.

## Taking Photographs

The etiquette of photographing people in most countries is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. Be especially polite if you want to photograph children or older women. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject and try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK.

Please do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

In museums or at archaeological sites, there may be restrictions on using your flash. Please obey any signs or directions by staff; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

## Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don't be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people.

Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room. Most hotels will offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe (for which you can set your own personal number). Please utilize this.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful.

## Japanese Cuisine

There are more than a dozen types of Japanese cuisine, each of which is distinctly different. Generally, only one type of cuisine is served in a given restaurant—for example raw seafood is served in a sushi bar, while tempura is featured at a tempura counter. There are, of course, some exceptions. Fancier restaurants tend to offer more choice. Below are brief descriptions of some of the main cuisines.

- **Kushiage:** Kushiage foods are breaded and deep-fried on skewers and include chicken, beef, seafood, and lots of seasonal vegetables (snow peas, green pepper, ginkgo nuts, lotus root, and the like). They're served with a specialty sauce and slice of lemon.
- **Okonomiyaki:** This cooking style originated in Osaka after World War II. It is a sort of Japanese pizza. A pancake is topped with meat or fish, shredded cabbage, vegetables, and Worcestershire sauce.
- **Robatayaki:** Robatayaki refers to restaurants in which seafood and vegetables are cooked over an open charcoal grill. All types of food ingredients are on the menu; the cooking distinction is that all foods are grilled.
- **Sashimi & Sushi:** Sashimi is simply raw seafood, usually eaten alone (without rice), and dipped into a mixture of wasabi and soy sauce. Sushi is raw fish with vinegared rice. It comes in many varieties, and is also served with wasabi and dipped in soy sauce.
- **Soba & Udon Noodles:** Soba noodles are made from buckwheat flour; udon noodles are a thick white wheat noodle. Both can be eaten plain, in soups, or in combination with other foods.
- **Shabu-Shabu & Sukiyaki:** The latter is among Japan's best-known beef dishes; it is often stir-fried at the table. Shabu-shabu is also prepared at your table and consists of thinly sliced beef cooked in a broth with vegetables in a kind of fondue.
- **Tempura:** This well-known Japanese food is fish and vegetables coated in a batter of egg, water, and wheat flour, and then deep-fried.
- **Teppanyaki:** A teppanyaki restaurant is a Japanese steakhouse. The chef cooks your steak and vegetables on a smooth hot grill right in front of you.

Please keep in mind that Japanese food typically features MSG, gluten, and fish broth. If you have a special meal request, we will do everything possible to assist but **special meal requests are not guaranteed in Japan** and there is a possibility of cross-contamination during food preparation. Due to these cultural differences, special meal requests may be very simple and limited in variety, such as meat, fish, and vegetables that are boiled or steamed without seasonings. You may consider bringing supplementary snacks or seasonings for your personal use.

## South Korean Cuisine

The key ingredients in Korean cuisine are **rice, noodles, vegetables, meats,** and **tofu**. Many dishes are simple with strong, pungent flavors. The harvest, preparation, and sharing of meals is an important part of the social fabric of Korea. Koreans from all levels of society pause at mealtime to come together for a communal experience. Korean meals often include a wealth of side dishes, or **banchan**, including the most famous example, **kimchi** (fermented Napa cabbage seasoned with chili peppers and salt).

- **Bibimbap**: This popular Korean dish is a “lunch in a bowl” combination of rice, vegetables, and beef that is often topped with a fried egg.
- **Jajangmyeon**: A Chinese dish of noodles with black bean sauce that the Koreans elevated and made their own using thicker noodles and adding more flavor.
- **Chimaek**: Another countrywide Korean favorite, which literally translates to “chicken beer,” and is just that: crispy fried chicken and beer.
- **Sundae**: A type of blood sausage that is a popular Korean street food.
- **Bulgogi**: Thin, marinated slices of beef or pork typically grilled on a barbecue. It is often stir-fried and eaten with Korean BBQ.

## Mongolian Cuisine

Only a very small percentage of Mongolian land is arable, which means that few crops grow there. Most agriculture is based in livestock—cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and camels. The result is a cuisine that leans heavily on meats and dairy but is light on vegetables. **Mutton, barley, yogurt, cheese,** a few vegetables, and either **noodles** or **rice** are common ingredients that Mongolian cooks use to their advantage.

- Some typical dishes include a trio of hearty dumplings called **buuz**, which are steamed; **bansh**, which are boiled, and **khuushuur**, which are fried. The dumplings are often filled with either mutton, goat, or beef seasoned with onion, garlic, and/or fennel seed.
- **Arvain guril**: Is a dish made with fried and malted barley eaten as a porridge made with milk fat and sugar.
- **Guriltai shul**: A Mongolian noodle soup that is made with onions, meat, and fried noodles.
- **Tsuivan**: This popular stew is made with cabbage, root vegetables, noodles, and mutton—although regional meat substitutes may be beef, camel, or horse.
- On special occasions, meat is cooked over hot stones to create dishes like **khorkhog**, which is mutton cooked in a container or a can, and **boodog**, which is meat (usually goat) cooked from the inside out. Yes, you read that correctly—the hot stones are inserted inside the animal’s stomach cavity, and then left to cook the meat from the inside. Only an experienced cook should try to prepare **boodog**, because if left too long, the steam from the hot rocks can buildup pressure and cause a goat explosion.

- Dairy products are also a mainstay of Mongolian cuisine and butter and cheese is made from many types of milk—**cow, sheep, goat, yak**, and even **camels**.
- Cheese may be in a form familiar to the West, or may be **aaruul**, dried curds.
- **Urum**: Or butter, which is similar to clotted cream, is often served in tea, or it may be caramelized into **khailmag**.
- Milk even takes on an alcoholic edge with **airag**, which is fermented mare’s milk, and **arkhi**, which is a milk-based liquor. (With about 2% alcohol by volume, **airag** is closer to slightly spiked yogurt. **Arkhi** is stronger, usually about 10% ABV.)

## Vietnamese Cuisine

Vietnam cuisine was shaped by myriad influences including France, China, India and Thailand, all of which combined to make a truly unique food scene. One of the key building blocks of Vietnamese cuisine—and of Vietnamese culture in general—is rice. Many kinds of meat, most commonly pork and fish, are also heavily featured. Dishes are flavored with basil, parsley, coriander, chilies, lemon grass, lime, and laksa leaf, meaning they can range from mild to very spicy. Peanuts are a common topping. Some typical dishes are:

- **Pho**: Pronounced “fuh,” this iconic soup is typically made with rice noodles and thinly sliced beef in a bone broth
- **Banh mi**: Vietnam’s version of the sub sandwich, with meat (usually pork) and veggies served on crusty French-style bread. They are popular all over the country, but many say the best ones are found in Ho Chi Minh City and Hoi An.
- **Bun bo hue**: Similar to pho, but with flat vermicelli-like noodles instead of cylindrical noodles.
- **Vietnamese coffee**: Vietnam is also the second-largest producer of coffee beans worldwide, with as many coffee shops as that suggests. Try the *ca phe nau* (also called *ca phe sua*) which is a strong dark brew cut with sweet condensed milk.
- **Nuoc mam**: Vietnam’s national condiment is a fermented fish sauce that is served with every meal.
- **Snacks**: Rice cakes and spring rolls are typical snacks, as is fruit. The Vietnamese grow and consume a variety of tropical fruits, including coconuts, bananas, melons, pineapples, lychees, mandarin oranges, and exotic items such as the green dragon fruit and the three-seeded cherry. Remember to stick to fruit with a peel or rind and avoid fruit washed in local tap water.

To get the most enjoyment from your trip, be open-minded about sampling different dishes and even using chopsticks. While we will make every effort to accommodate dietary restrictions, please note that choices may be limited and that special requests are not guaranteed.

## Tokyo in Brief

### City Layout and Details

Tokyo is situated at one end of Tokyo Bay, where it spreads across the Kanto Plain. The city still retains some of its Edo Period structures. Most notable is the Imperial Palace, surrounded by lush park grounds and the original castle moat, situated right in the middle of the city. A bit farther out are the remnants of another circular moat, built by the Tokugawa shogun. The inner city is looped by the JR Yamanote Line (public transport). Most of Tokyo's major nightspots and attractions are near or inside this oblong loop.

For administrative purposes, Tokyo is divided into 23 wards, known as ku. Its business districts of Marunouchi and Hibiya, for example, are in Chiyoda-ku, while Ginza is part of Chuo-ku. These two ku are the historic hearts of Tokyo—it was here that the city had its first modest settlements.

There is no doubt about it, the city design, with its zigzagging streets (a layout left over from historic times), is very confusing. To make matters worse, Tokyo's address system is largely based on a complicated number scheme rather than street names. The only streets with names are those named after World War II at the insistence of the American occupation forces, plus a few that have been labeled in the past decade. The most important named streets include Meiji Dori, which follows the loop of the Yamanote Line; Yasukuni Dori and Shinjuku Dori, which cut across the heart of the city from Shinjuku to Chiyoda-ku; and Sotobori Dori, Chuo Dori, Harumi Dori, and Showa Dori, which pass through Ginza. Dori means avenue or street, as does michi.

### Local Transportation

If you're taking the subway or JR train, the first thing you should do upon reaching your destination is look for signs posted on every platform that tell which exit to take for particular buildings and attractions. These will at least get you pointed in the right direction once you emerge from the station. As you walk around Tokyo, you will also notice maps posted beside sidewalks giving a breakdown of the number system for the area.

## Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

### Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

## Crafts & Souvenirs

### Japan

Souvenirs are a Japanese staple and are sold everywhere, even near shrines. For example if you visit the temples in Arashiyama, keep an eye out for goods made from Japanese fabric. Also, each city we visit offers many places and shops where you can find nice souvenir items.

- **Department Stores:** Japanese department stores are famous the world over, and with good reason. They are like mini-cities and contain just about everything produced in Japan, from food courts to departments selling such items as cameras and computers. They also sell many traditional Japanese crafts. And the service is outstanding with attentive clerks and beautiful gift-wrapping.
- **Crafts:** The Japanese highly value traditional crafts and produce some wonderful goods. Japanese artisans are skilled at traditional crafts such as ceramics, lacquerware, and basket making, and produce world-famous fine knives and cutlery.
- **Regional Traditions:** These destinations are well known for their products: Mikimoto pearl in Toba; fabric, embroidery and incense in Kyoto. You will find Japanese paper products and Japanese pastry with elaborate work throughout Japan.
- **Antiques:** There are some excellent flea markets and open-air antique dealers in Tokyo and Kyoto.
- **Electronics:** Digital cameras, laser discs, CD players, calculators, and hand-held computers are ubiquitous in Japan with good bargains common. In Tokyo you'll want to visit Akihabara, a huge electrical appliance district with open-front shops selling every possible electronic gadget. Shoppers mob this district, so be prepared for crowds.
- **Porcelain, Pottery:** Japan is a big producer of high-quality pottery and porcelain items. All of the big department stores carry superb pottery such as the Satsuma Arima, Hagi, Bizen and Tobe pottery. Other famous ceramic companies are Kutani in Kanazawa and Kiyomizu in Kyoto.

### South Korea

From department stores and high-end boutiques to more traditional markets, there are many shopping opportunities in South Korea. In Seoul, the main shopping area is in the city center, featuring two department stores and malls in addition to the popular Myeong-dong and Namdaemun markets.

- **Crafts:** Traditional crafts in Korea include products made from bamboo, pottery, lacquerware furniture, wooden masks, macrame, and embroidery.
- **Brush painting:** You will find a variety of brush paintings and calligraphy, as well as supplies in Korea. Brushes come in all different sizes and you will find a colorful array of inks. You may also find traditional paper of various textures at specialty shops.

- **Fashion:** Try on a *hanbok*, the traditional Korean garment or some beautiful hair pins, brooches, and other accessories. You may also find great deals on leather items, including coats, belts, gloves, shoes, and wallets.
- **Jade:** Jade, a symbol of purity in Korea, is made into statues as well as many different types of jewelry, including necklaces, bracelets, and hair pins.
- **Food:** You will find lots of interesting and healthy packaged snacks and treats that can make great gifts for friends and family at home. Some items to look for include *tteok* (a Korean rice cake), *soonja* cookies (also called “well-being” cookies), and rice wine, such as *soju* or *makkolli*. And while you might not be able to bring it home, don’t forget to try *kimch*’i!

## Mongolia

Mongolia offers many fine craft items at good prices—cashmere, leather goods, traditional clothing, hats, musical instruments—these are just some of the items to be on the look out for while shopping in Mongolia. Generally you can pay with local currency only, although some businesses will take credit cards and occasionally you can use U.S. dollars (see the previous “Credit Cards” and “Currency” sections for details).

You can find lovely and unique antiques in Mongolia for reasonable prices, but be aware that there are export laws in place, so some items cannot leave the country. Make sure the shop understands that you’ll be taking the item out of the country and that they provide the correct documentation to do so. Also note that most stores do not allow returns (it is just not a part of the culture).

## Vietnam

Vietnam offers many fine craft items at good prices. Traditional souvenirs include silk, precious stones, hilltribe handicrafts, including elaborate jewelry, colorful textiles, and opium pipes, bronzeware cutlery, nielloware silver inlaid items, and lacquerware. Local products include hand-woven cottons, decorative items made of silver, teakwood carvings, and gems. The best bargains in gems are jade, rubies, and sapphires, but buy from reputable dealers only.

Merchants enjoy negotiating prices almost everywhere but if you make an offer you should be prepared to buy at that price. It is not unusual for the clerks in some stores in Vietnam to follow, assist, and advise you throughout the store—much as a personal shopper would do in the U.S. This is meant to be polite rather than pestering.

*Note about antiquities:* Think carefully before purchasing an expensive “antiquity.” It is illegal to remove antique furniture or ceramics from Vietnam. To complicate matters further, any item that looks old can only be exported with the written permission of the Antique Art Business Division of the government Fine Arts Department. Some stores will offer to arrange this for you, but this may be unreliable.

## U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

## DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

---

### Japan

#### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 145,913 square miles
- **Capital:** Tokyo
- **Languages:** Japanese is the official language of Japan.
- **Ethnicity:** Japanese 98.5%, Koreans 0.5%, Chinese 0.4%, other 0.6%
- **Location:** An archipelago extending in an arc more than 1,744 miles from northeast to southwest in the Pacific Ocean, Japan is separated from the east coast of Asia by the Sea of Japan.
- **Geography:** The Sea of Japan separates Japan from the east coast of Asia. Japan consists of four major islands: Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku. The Kurils to the northeast of the main islands are now occupied by Russia and subject to dispute. About 60% of Japan is mountain terrain, and the country is blessed with beautiful and varied landscape as well as lush greenery.
- **Population:** 125,620,000 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84%, other 16% (including Christian 0.7%)
- **Time Zone:** Japan is on Japan Standard Time, 14 hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 8pm in Tokyo.

## National Holidays: Japan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Japan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a Gregorian calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

02/11 National Foundation Day

02/23 Emperor's Birthday

04/29 Showa Day (usually the start of Golden Week)

05/03 Constitution Memorial Day

05/04 Greenery Day

05/05 Children's Day

3rd Monday in July Marine Day

8/11 Mountain Day

3rd Monday in September Respect for the Aged Day

2nd Monday in October Health and Sports Day

11/03 Culture Day

11/23 Labor Thanksgiving Day

## Japan: A Brief History

Japan's recorded history begins in about AD 400 when the Yamato clan, a group who controlled much of the island's central and western lands, conquered its rivals and introduced the concept of an imperial court to Japan—something similar to China's court. About this same time, Buddhism was introduced to Japan by way of neighboring Korea. Up until the 16th century, Japan's history was dominated by tales of harsh warlords, each controlling his own small area, engaging in struggles with neighbors or intruders. Then, like many of its Asian neighbors, Japan underwent transformational changes when waves of foreigners arrived at its shores seeking trade and riches.

Foreign influences began in 1543, when Portuguese ships brought traders and missionaries to Japan. Not far behind, Spanish, Dutch, and English traders had the same thing in mind. Eventually, the Tokugawa, a family of warlords—or shoguns—had enough. Taking control over most of Japan in the early 17th century, they banned Christianity and sealed off Japan from all outsiders for the next 250 years—except for the Dutch, who were allowed to trade at the port of Nagasaki. Then, in 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry sailed an American fleet into Tokyo Bay, forcing the Japanese to open the country to trade. Japan quickly developed into a modern power with a large imperial army.

Throughout the latter part of the 19th century and into the early 20th century, Japan was often at war with its neighbors China and Russia over territorial claims. Firmly in the throes of a militaristic society, Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, then invaded China in 1936. And on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked American forces at Pearl Harbor, initiated a war with the United States. But by 1942, Japanese military successes in the Pacific were waning. Forced to retreat island by island back to their home island, the Japanese military finally surrendered after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Soviet Union declared war on Japan in 1945.

After a post-World War II occupation under United States General Douglas MacArthur, Japan regained full sovereignty in 1952. By the 1970s, Japan developed into one of the world's great economic powers, dominating worldwide banking and industry, and having great success in the automotive business. Japan became the world's second-largest economy after the United States. Then, throughout the 1990s Japan was plagued by banking and industrial scandals and had a succession of governments, explaining why some have nicknamed this the "lost decade". Today, Japan's economy has recovered but not regained the full luster of past decades.

In March of 2011, Japan's northeast coast was hit by a large offshore earthquake, which in turn triggered a tsunami. Although powerful, the damage from the initial earthquake was minor compared to the damage caused by the tsunami, which reached heights of 133 feet and flooded inland as far as six miles. The northern prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima were particularly hard-hit, which put the nuclear power plants Fukushima Daiichi and Fukushima Daini at risk. By deliberately venting some radioactive isotopes from the Daiichi plant, Japanese authorities averted a meltdown, but these actions continue to raise concerns about the impact to the region immediately surrounding the plant. Many citizens felt the government leadership had not handled the crisis well and criticized the rebuild effort as too slow. As a result, Prime Minister Naoto Kan stepped down in 2011; he was succeeded by Yoshihiko Noda, who in turn was defeated by Shinzo Abe.

Due to reasons of declining health, Emperor Akihito announced that he was ready to step down from the Chrysanthemum Throne; and his formal abdication in 2019 made him the first Japanese monarch to do so in more than 200 years. Also due to health issues, Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest serving prime minister, announced in August 2020 that he is stepping down.

## South Korea

### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 38,502 square miles
- **Capital:** Seoul
- **Languages:** Korean
- **Ethnicity:** Homogeneous Korean (except for about 20,000 Chinese)
- **Location:** The southern half of the Korean Peninsula bordering the Sea of Japan, Yellow Sea, and North Korea by land.
- **Geography:** South Korea is composed mainly of hills and mountainous terrain, its highest point being approximately 6,400 feet above sea level, with wide coastal plains in the west and south.
- **Population:** 49,115,196 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Christian 31.6%, Buddhist 24.2%, other or unknown 0.9%, none 43.3%

- **Time Zone:** South Korea is on Korean Standard Time, 14 hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 8pm in Seoul.

### National Holidays: South Korea

In addition to the holidays listed below, South Korea celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Seollal. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

03/01 Independence Movement Day

05/01 Labor Day

05/05 Children's Day

06/06 Memorial Day

08/15 Liberation Day

10/03 National Foundation Day

10/09 Hangeul Proclamation Day

12/25 Christmas Day

### South Korea: A Brief History

Legend has it that a king named Dangun established Korea in 2333 BC. But similar to Britain's King Arthur, King Dangun may be a well-loved national symbol, but there is little evidence that he actually existed. It is more likely that Korea was first populated during the late Stone Age as the earliest pottery fragments that have been found date back to about 8,000 BC. As the Iron Age began (roughly 400 BC) the agricultural communities on the Korean Peninsula banded together as loosely-organized states, and then federations that became known as the Three Kingdoms: Goguryeo (founded in 37 BC), Baekje (18 BC), and Silla (57 BC), each of whom left their mark on Korean history.

With Silla the dominant power in southern Korea and a former Goguryeo general dominating the north, some historians call this time "the North and South States Period". And even today, South Korea tends to identify with Silla while North Korea tends to reference Goguryeo. It wasn't until 200 years later—in 918—that the two states were united under a single ruler, the charismatic Taejo Wang Geon, who took advantage of internal fighting in Silla to seize power and found his own dynasty. The new kingdom was known as Goryeo—which is the origin of the word "Korea"—and is usually seen as the start of modern Korea. Once in power, Taejo Wang Geon set about reconciling the two former rival states with leniency and tact. Instead of punishing the defeated Silla, he sought alliances with the local clans, allowed the Silla nobles to keep their place in society, and even married a Silla princess to ensure their royal line did not die out. This policy of reconciliation through diplomatic measures—plus his work in codifying laws and promoting Buddhism—gave his dynasty a stable foundation that would last four centuries.

In the early 1300s, Korean society was mostly stable, prosperous, and orderly. Citizens had a place in the social order based on rank, with the aristocratic elite at the top, the military and scholarly classes in the middle, and peasantry (mostly farmers) as the lower class. At the bottom were slaves and the *cheonmin* (an outcast group of butchers, tanners, and entertainers). Culturally, the

country drew inspiration from China. There was a great deal of trade between the two nations, and while Buddhism was the official religion in Korea, Chinese-style Confucianism was also practiced and respected. All this changed when the Golden Horde swept across Asia.

By 1231 the Mongols had reached Korea, which was prized because of its maritime experience, and for most of the next century Korea was either fighting the Mongols or serving them as a dependent state. The Mongols created internal struggles within Korea that only became worse when the Mongol Empire itself was overthrown in 1316. This paved the way for General Yi Seong-gye to overthrow the Goryeo rulers and found his own dynasty, the Joseon. Joseon rule, which lasted about a century, was a period notable for a rise in Confucianism while Buddhist monks were exiled into the mountains, along with many policies introduced to advance Korean society. By the end of the 1880s Koreans were divided between those who wished to embrace traditional culture and those seeking reforms to modernize and level class differences.

The Gapsin Coup in 1884 was meant to drive reform, but instead created an opportunity for foreign powers like Japan, China, and Russia to insert themselves in Korean politics, effectively creating an international rivalry over Korea. Tension mounted when two of the rivals—Japan and Russia—went to war in 1904. With Japan proving victorious, Korea fell into their sphere of influence and was formally annexed in 1910, with Japan ruling Korea until 1945. Although relatively brief, Japan's brutal rule left deep scars in the Korean psyche. Among Korea's shameful humiliations were Japan's use of Korean girls as so-called "comfort women", prostitutes for Japanese soldiers during World War II.

After the war, Korea was in a difficult position. As subjects of Japan, the Koreans had been forced to take part in the war on the Japanese side in spite of their horrific treatment by the Japanese themselves. To further complicate matters, Russian troops occupied the north of the country above the 38th parallel, while American troops held the south, and neither wanted to give up their position. Ultimately Russia and the U.S. wanted different people to lead the new Korea (Russia picked Kim Il-sung; the U.S. wanted Rhee Syngman). When each man formed provisional governments in "their" half of Korea, it effectively split the country.

Each side claimed they were the legitimate government, and each claimed the right to rule the entire peninsula. Tensions mounted from 1948 to 1950, during which time there were conflicts along the border. The United Nations tried to intervene, but to no avail. In 1950 war broke out between the communist north and the U.S.-backed south. Three years later neither side had won control of all of Korea, but the destruction and loss of three million lives convinced both parties to agree to a compromise—the division of the peninsula into two separate countries, today's North Korea and South Korea. After the division, South Korea's history fell into a pattern of political instability. A series of republics, military coups, martial law, and corruption charges plagued South Korean politics through the 1990s. However, recent years have seen more political stability and a focus on renewing the national economy.

## Mongolia

### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 603,909 square miles

- **Capital:** Ulaanbaatar
- **Languages:** Khalkha Mongol 90%, Turkic, and Russian are spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Khalkh 81.9%, Kazak 3.8%, Dorvod 2.7%, Bayad 2.1%, Buryat–Bouriates 1.7%, Zakhchin 1.2%, Dariganga 1%, Uriankhai 1%, other 4.6%
- **Location:** Mongolia is bordered by Russia and China.
- **Geography:** Mongolia encompasses a wide range of terrain, with mountains, grassy steppes, and vast flat desert. Most of the north and west of the country is mountainous or hilly grasslands; the Gobi Desert takes up most of the south and the east. The country is land-locked, and although there are lakes and streams in certain areas, the combination of the terrain and low water supply means that a very small percent of the land is arable.
- **Population:** 3,495,090
- **Religion:** Buddhist 53%, Muslim 3%, Christian 2.2%, Shamanist 2.9%, other 0.4%, none 38.6%
- **Time Zone:** Mongolia observes Ulaanbaatar Time, twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Ulaanbaatar.

### National Holidays: Mongolia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Mongolia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter . To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

	03/08 International Women’s Day
	07/11 Naadam Holiday (Day 1)
	07/12 Naadam Holiday (Day 2)
	07/13 Naadam Holiday (Day 3)
01/01 New Year’s Day	07/14 Naadam Holiday (Day 4)
February Tsagaan Sur Lunar New Year (moves each year; see note above)	07/15 Naadam Holiday (Day 5)
	12/29 Independence Day

### Mongolia: A Brief History

Human habitation in Mongolia stretches back a surprisingly long time. The earliest traces date from 800,000 years ago, when Homo erectus lived in caves in the southwest. Modern man (Homo sapiens) arrived much later—only 40,000 years ago. By about 1000 BC, it appears that many local tribes turned away from farming and took up a nomadic existence instead. Horseback riding and nomadic way of life were to become hallmarks of Mongolian culture for thousands of years.

It wasn’t until 209 B.C. that an official confederation of tribes emerged under a single head—King Modu Chanyu of the Xiongnu tribe. His military force soon emerged as the greatest threat to the Chinese kingdom, prompting the Chinese emperor to build a very large defensive wall—now known as the Great Wall of China. From 209 B.C. to 93 A.D., the Xiongnu Dynasty ran an empire

that was larger than modern-day Mongolia. Subsequent dynasties, such as the Xianbei (93–234 A.D.), the Rouran (330–555), and the Gokturks (555–745) continued to enlarge the empire's holdings.

It was most likely the Rouran who were the first to use the words “Khan” as a title meaning “king” and “Khagan” meaning “emperor.” The use of two titles reflects the feudal nature of the society at the time—as no one man (or woman, there were “Khatun”)—could hold such a large territory, each region or tribe tended to have its own leader, equivalent in rank to a king. The Khagan, or emperor, was typically the strongest of these kings, and the one who would lead the others in military campaigns. When more than one strong king rose to power, the title of emperor was up for grabs. Such a situation occurred in 745, when the Uyghur, Karluk, and Basmyl tribes all rebelled against the ruling Gokturks. In the resulting power vacuum, the Uyghurs dominated the other tribes, and formed their own empire. Although ultimately defeated by the Kyrgyz (the ancestors of modern-day Kyrgyzstan), the Uyghurs left a strong cultural legacy—it was their script that was adopted as the official writing of Mongolia by Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

With the decline of the Uyghurs, a period of uncertainty followed until the rise of a chieftain named Temujin. In 1206 Temujin took the title Genghis Khan (King Genghis), united the Mongol tribes, and began a remarkable series of military campaigns across Asia and Europe. The result was the largest continuous land empire that has ever existed in human history. At its height, the Mongol Empire covered roughly 22% of the world's landmass. Yet when the Great Khan died in 1227, he was buried in an unmarked grave, in accordance with the customs of his tribe. After his death, the Mongol Empire gained lands and fame under Genghis' immediate descendants. The most notable of these successors was his grandson Kublai Khan, who founded the Yuan Dynasty in China. It wasn't until the fall of the Yuan in 1368 that the Mongol Empire collapsed back into smaller states.

For the next 200–300 years, the tribes of Mongolia would follow a pattern of fighting amongst themselves, uniting briefly under a strong leader, and then returning to disunion. The constant shifts in power only ended with the conquest of Mongolia by the Chinese Qing Dynasty in the 17th century. But in many ways, the Qing simply added new layers to the existing Mongol hierarchy. The Mongol nobles still attended on the Mongol emperor, who in turn was a vassal of the Qing emperor. The biggest change was at the bottom level of society—the Chinese assigned different levels of serfdom to the Mongol peasants.

The Chinese also divided Mongolia into different areas of administrative control; this is where the terms “Inner Mongolia” and “Outer Mongolia” come from. When the Qing Dynasty collapsed in 1911, Mongolia turned to Imperial Russia for protection and recognition as an independent state. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, China reasserted its claim; ultimately Outer Mongolia won its independence in 1921 with Soviet backing. A communist regime was installed in 1924 and remained in power until a peaceful democratic revolution in 1990. (Inner Mongolia remained a part of China. Today Inner Mongolia is still considered an official part of China, but not quite Chinese—like Tibet or Hong Kong.)

# Vietnam

## Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 127,800 square miles
- **Capital:** Hanoi
- **Languages:** Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)
- **Ethnicities:** Kinh (Viet) 85.7%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.8%, Muong 1.5%, Khmer 1.5%, Mong 1.2%, Nung 1.1%, other 5.3%
- **Location:** Vietnam is bordered by the South China Sea (“the East Sea”), China, Laos, and Cambodia.
- **Geography:** It is about a thousand miles long and ranges in width from 30 miles in the central region to 400 miles in the north. There are five principle geographic areas. There are two mountainous areas, covered largely by forests or jungles: the Northern Highlands, located in the northwest, and the Annamite Range that extends from it down the western portion of the country towards Ho Chi Minh City. The two delta areas—the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south—hold most of the country’s population and also provide the majority of the country’s farmland. The Coastal Lowlands, which lie between the delta areas, are also heavily populated.
- **Population:** 97,205,000 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Buddhist 9.3%, Catholic 6.7%, Hoa Hao 1.5%, Cao Dai 1.1%, Protestant 0.5%, Muslim 0.1%, none 80.8%. (Although Communists have discouraged the practice of religion, those who do practice are generally Buddhists.)
- **Time zone:** Vietnam is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Hanoi.

## National Holidays: Vietnam

In addition to the holidays listed below, Vietnam celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

February Tet Lunar New Year (moves each year; see note above)

April Hung Kings Commemoration Day (moves each year; see note above)

04/30 Reunification Day

05/01 Labor Day

09/02 Independence Day

12/24 Christmas Eve

12/25 Christmas Day

12/31 New Year's Eve

## Vietnam: A Brief History

Vietnam's earliest known residents were hunters and farmers who migrated into the area from the north and south. In 111 B.C., armies of China's Han dynasty conquered the region of present-day Vietnam and would go on to rule the region for more than a thousand years. It was not until A.D. 939 when the Vietnamese were finally able to oust the Chinese to begin self-rule while renaming the country Dai Co Viet. Powerful family dynasties went on to rule Vietnam for the next 900 years. Power struggles among feuding families in the north and south persisted until 1802, when Nguyen Anh unified the country and named it Vietnam, giving himself the title Emperor Gia Long.

After stiff resistance, Vietnam would finally fall to French colonial rule in 1884. Now part of French Indochina, Vietnam remained under French domination until 1940, when Germany occupied France during World War II and Germany's ally Japan took control of Vietnam. After Japan's defeat, in September 1945, the communist Vietminh led by Ho Chi Minh gained control of many regions of the country. Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam an independent nation—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. France re-asserted its claim on the region, and French forces regained control in the south. However, resistance from the Vietminh continued, and the Communists still controlled the north. By late 1946, the Indochina War was in full progress, continuing until 1954, when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. In 1954, delegates to an international conference in Geneva agreed to a temporary division of Vietnam into two separate countries—North and South Vietnam. In 1955, elections were held in South Vietnam, and Ngo Dinh Diem was chosen leader. By 1957, the Vietminh in the south, now called the Viet Cong, had begun an armed revolt against Diem's government, supported by North Vietnam. More countries were drawn in as the fighting continued, including the U.S., which became deeply embroiled in the conflict by the late 1960s. The U.S.S.R. and China supported North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, a series of coups eventually brought army general Nguyen Van Thieu to power; he was then elected president in 1967. In North Vietnam, the Communist Party Politburo took over following Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969. The war ended in 1975 with the withdrawal of American troops. In 1976, the country was unified under the Communists as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

More than three million Vietnamese had been killed in the decades of war, and the country's economy had been devastated. Many Vietnamese emigrated to the U.S. and other countries. In 1978, Vietnam severed its ties with China and aligned itself more closely with the Soviet Union. That same year, Vietnam drew China's wrath by invading Cambodia, an incursion that lasted into the 1980s. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of its economic support, Vietnam began to liberalize its trade policies, allow private enterprise, and encourage foreign trade. From 1990 to 1997, Vietnam's economy grew rapidly. In 1994, the U.S. lifted its trade embargo, and in 1995, full diplomatic relations were restored.

## RESOURCES

---

### Suggested Reading

#### Japan

***A Geek in Japan*** by Hector Garcia (2019, Culture) If you want to be “in the know” about Japanese cool culture, this offers a breezy, light overview of pop culture trends in Japan such as *manga* (comic books), *anime* (animated films), and *harajuku* colorful street fashion).

***The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*** by David Mitchell (2010, Historical Fiction) The year is 1799, and the handful of traders from the Dutch East India company who are allowed to work in Japan are confined to an island in Nagasaki Harbor—yet somehow quiet bookkeeper Jacob de Zoet meets and falls in love with a beautiful Japanese midwife.

***Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*** by Laura Hillenbrand (2010, Biography/History) In a true story so unlikely that it reads like fiction, *Unbroken* recounts the exploits of Louis Zamperini, a U.S. airman whose plane crashes in a remote Japanese-controlled waters of the Pacific. It’s an astonishing tale of survival about one of WWII’s many forgotten heroes.

***Flags of Our Fathers*** by James Bradley (2006, History) Gain further insights into the clash between the East and West during the war years in this personal story of the six young American soldiers who raised the flag at Iwo Jima, as told by the son of one of the six. It’s filled with gripping tales of individual heroism in the battle over an island riddled with tunnels and 22,000 Japanese defenders who planned to fight to the last man.

***Geisha, A Life*** by Mineko Iwasaki (2003, Memoir) The memoir of a celebrated geisha, rich in details, culture, and the traditions of Kyoto’s Gion Kobu district. The book provides a rare and intimate glimpse into a hidden world from the Japanese woman who was also the primary source for Arthur Golden’s best-selling novel, ***Memoirs of a Geisha***.

#### South Korea

***This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History*** by T.R. Fehrenbach (History) A comprehensive history of the Korean War written by an officer who witnessed the conflict firsthand.

***Please Look After Mom*** by Kyung-sook Shin (Literature) A Korean bestseller that gives a contemporary view of Korean life. This story is about a family’s search for their mother who goes missing one afternoon in Seoul.

***When My Name Was Keoko*** by Linda Sue Park (Literature) A compelling story about a brother and sister living in Korea and struggling to maintain their identities during the Japanese occupation leading up to World War II.

***Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story*** by William Andrews (Historical Fiction) This is a powerful story about a young Korean woman who is torn from her family at a young age and forced to become a comfort woman for Japanese soldiers during World War II. While this is an elegantly written novel, the story is based on a disturbing part of Korean history that some readers may find distressful.

***The Coldest Winter*** by David Halberstam (Non-Fiction) The best comprehensive account of the Korean War to date, covering the battles, strategies, politics, and personalities on both sides of this tragic period of American history. Halberstam himself, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his defining book on the Vietnam War, *The Best and the Brightest*, considered this his best work.

## Mongolia

***On the Trail of Genghis Khan*** by Tim Cope (Travel Narrative) Recommended by our regional office for the epic sweep of its author's endeavor: To travel from the ancient Mongolian capital of Karakorum to Hungary by horseback—the same journey taken by Genghis Khan.

***The Dinosaur Artist: Obsession, Betrayal, and the Quest for Earth's Ultimate Trophy*** by Paige Williams (Non-Fiction) A red flag was raised when “a superb Tyrannosaurus skeleton” appeared on the cover of New York auction catalog in 2012. The problem was that the nearly complete fossil (which sold for more than \$1 million) was of *T. bataar*, close cousin of *T. rex*, and had been unearthed more than 6,000 miles away in Mongolia's Gobi Desert. Politics, science, and greed collide in this fascinating book that looks at the murky world of fossil collecting and asks who owns natural history—especially in places like the remote Flaming Cliffs of Mongolia, home to one of the richest fossil beds in the world.

***Wolf Totem*** by Jiang Rong (Literature) This novel tells the story of a Chinese student who is sent to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution, where he develops a special connection with the Mongolian wolf. Although set in Inner Mongolia (not Mongolia proper), the novel is based on the author's real-life experiences during the 1970s, and gives a strong sense of Mongolian culture and the nomadic life.

***Hearing Birds Fly*** by Louisa Waugh (Travel Narrative) A charming look back at her year teaching English in a Mongolian village. Winner of the 2004 Ondaatje Prize, which is awarded by the Royal Society of Literature for a work that evokes “spirit of place”.

***Khubilai Khan's Lost Fleet: In Search of a Legendary Armada*** by James P. Delgado (History) How could a fleet of 700 ships, owned by the most powerful empire on earth, be lost in only 15 years? Archeologist Delgado joins with a Japanese dive team to try to answer that very question. But first they must locate the lost fleet, which most historians consider nothing more than a legend.

## Vietnam

***The Sympathizer*** by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2016, Fiction) The taut story of a double agent who secretly sympathizes with the Communist forces during the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975. A brilliant page-turner of a novel that won numerous awards including the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

***Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam*** by Kim Fay (2012, Food). Part cookbook and part travelogue, this book follows Seattle native Kim Fay, who had lived in Vietnam for four years in the '90s, as she returns to Vietnam for a 5-week culinary safari from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. Beautiful, bold photographs and stories about the chefs accompany authentic recipes.

***Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram*** by Dang Thuy Tram (2008, Diary) As a young doctor working for the North Vietnamese Army, Dang Thuy Tram kept a diary of her experiences between the years 1968 and 1970 until she was killed by American forces near where she worked. Found by an American soldier, the diary was returned to her family and published for the first time almost 30 years later.

***When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace*** by Le Ly Hayslip (1989, Memoir) The true-life story of a Vietnamese girl forced into the war (on both sides), where she faced constant danger, near starvation, and torture. A riveting, emotional, and brutally honest look at what it takes to survive a war. The sequel, ***Child of War, Woman of Peace*** describes the author's life in America after the war's end.

***The Quiet American*** by Graham Greene (1956, Literature) Quite possibly the most famous novel set in Vietnam, and a classic love triangle too. A knowing British war correspondent and a hopeful American are caught up in both revolutionary politics and whirlwind romance in 1950s Saigon. Unfortunately, they both fall for the same Vietnamese woman.

## Suggested Films & Videos

### Japan

***Jiro Dreams of Sushi*** (2011, Documentary) A loving documentary about Jiro Ono, the first sushi chef to win the coveted three-star rating from Michelin. A good choice for both foodies and the sushi novice.

***Lost in Translation*** (2003, Drama) Sofia Coppola's acclaimed romantic/comedy/drama centers around two lost souls—a bored former movie star played by Bill Murray, and the listless young wife of a photographer played by Scarlett Johansson—who make connections as they wander around Tokyo.

***Godzilla*** (1956, Horror/Monster) The original Japanese monster flick maybe campy and silly, but it spawned a serious business—over 28 sequels and remakes—plus it created a serious icon of Japanese pop culture. Fun fact: Godzilla has his own star on the Hollywood walk of fame.

***Memoirs of a Geisha*** (2005, Drama) Movie adaptation of the novel by the same name. A romantic and sweeping story that won Oscars for cinematography, art direction, and costumes.

***Spirited Away*** (2001, Anime) It may seem odd to suggest an animated film, but the Japanese-based Studio Ghibli is such a cultural touchstone that we had to include at least one of their films! And while other titles like *Kiki's Delivery Service* or *Howl's Moving Castle* could have made the cut, it is hard to overlook *Spirited Away*, which blends modern animation with traditional folklore into the story of a 10-year-old girl trying to save her parents from a spell.

## Korea

***Parasite*** (2019 Drama/Thriller) This brilliantly dark comedy from Korean writer-director Bong Joon-ho (*Snowpiercer*) about a poor family in Seoul insinuating themselves into the lives of a wealthy family won four well-deserved Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

***Seoul Train*** (2004, Documentary) This documentary dives into the lives of North Korean defectors who put their lives on the line to escape their homeland.

***M.A.S.H.*** (1970, Comedy) Although really meant to criticize events in Vietnam at the time, Robert Altman's black comedy takes place in a Korean War field hospital where the staff uses humor as a coping mechanism for dealing with the atrocities of the war.

***Kimchi Chronicles*** (TV series, 2011) A PBS program that delves into Korean cuisine and culture in this travelogue series following a Korean-born woman raised in Virginia as she rediscovers her heritage.

***The Last Princess*** (2016, Foreign) A dramatic period piece about Princess Deokhye (the last princess of Korea's Joseon dynasty) who was forced to live in Japan against her wishes. A story that echoes the love-hate relationship between Korea and Japan.

## Mongolia

***Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan*** (2008, Biopic/Foreign) A sweeping historical epic that focuses on the early life of Genghis Khan. The director used Mongolian actors and filmed on location. If you'd prefer a non-fiction approach, look for *Genghis Khan: Terror and Conquest* from A&E's Biography series.

***Dinosaur Hunters: Secrets of the Gobi Desert*** (2002, Natural History) Part of the wide-ranging National Geographic series, this documentary follows a joint expedition by members of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and the American Museum of Natural History.

***The Story of the Weeping Camel*** (2003, Documentary) A film that focuses on a Mongolian family's attempts to save a rare white camel that has been rejected by its mother. Nominated for a "Best Documentary" Oscar in 2004.

***The Cave of the Yellow Dog*** (2005, Drama) A gentle fable about a nomadic girl who takes in a stray dog. The film won several awards, including "Best Children's Film" at the Deutscher Filmpreis (Germany's Oscars). By the same director as *The Story of the Weeping Camel*.

***Wolf Totem*** (2015, Action) The film adaptation of the book by the same name. A Chinese student adopts a wolf club during his exile in Mongolia under the Cultural Revolution.

## Vietnam

**Anthony Bordain: No Reservations—Vietnam** (2009, Travel/Food) Three episodes of the popular series were filmed in Vietnam and offer rich insights about life in modern-day Vietnam and regional cuisine from bustling Saigon to the countryside of Da Lat. Also worth viewing is Bordain's **Parts Unknown: Hanoi** (2016) the classic episode featuring former U.S. President Barack Obama and Bordain sitting down together at a small restaurant in Hanoi enjoying beers and bun cha, a local specialty.

**Good Morning Vietnam** (1987, Comedy) While the irreverent humor of Armed Forces Radio Service host Adrian Cronauer (played by Robin Williams) amuses the troops stuck in 1965-era Vietnam, he clashes with the Army brass who try to censor his show.

**Hearts and Minds** (1974, Documentary) This landmark documentary offers an unflinching portrait of America's involvement in the Vietnam War using newsreel footage and interviews. Many consider it the most important film ever made about this period.

**Apocalypse Now** (1979, Drama) Francis Ford Coppola's surreal Vietnam War epic was inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and stars Martin Sheen as an Army captain on a secret mission to track down a renegade Special Services colonel played by Marlon Brando.

**The Quiet American** (1958, Classic) A love triangle between a British journalist, a young Vietnamese woman, and a U.S. official, based on the Graham Greene novel—although Greene would disavow the film for flipping the book's message. Instead of a cautionary tale about foreign intervention, the film's focus is anticommunist advocacy of American power (Audie Murphy, the film's star, reportedly said he wouldn't have done the movie if it stuck to Greene's anti-American message). The 2002 remake starring Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser sticks much closer to Greene's novel and received widespread acclaim. It suffered bad timing though—Its "unpatriotic" message did not go over well with audiences after 9/11.

## Useful Websites

### **Overseas Adventure Travel**

[www.oattravel.com](http://www.oattravel.com)

### **Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions**

[www.oattravel.com/faq](http://www.oattravel.com/faq)

### **International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)**

[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

### **Electricity & Plugs**

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

### **Foreign Exchange Rates**

[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)  
[www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic)

### **ATM Locators**

[www.mastercard.com/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/atm)  
[www.visa.com/atmlocator](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator)

### **World Weather**

[www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)  
[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
[www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

### **Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)**

[www.travlang.com/languages](http://www.travlang.com/languages)

### **Packing Tips**

[www.travelite.org](http://www.travelite.org)

### **U.S. Customs & Border Protection**

[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

### **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)**

[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

### **National Passport Information Center**

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

### **Holidays Worldwide**

[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)

### **History & Culture**

[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

## Useful Apps

### **Flight Stats**

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

### **LoungeBuddy**

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

### **Timeshifter**

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

### **GoogleMaps**

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

### **Triposo**

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

### **Rome2rio**

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

### **Flush or Sit or Squat**

Find a clean toilet anywhere

### **Uber**

Ride sharing around the world

### **Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus**

#### **ATM locations**

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

### **TunnelBear**

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

### **What's App, Skype, or Signal**

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

### **Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel**

Learn dozens of foreign languages

### **Google Translate**

Fast and simple translations

### **XE**

Currency conversions

### **SizeGuide**

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

### **Best Units Converter**

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

### **Tourlina**

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

### **Happy Cow**

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

### **Eatwith**

Dine with locals all over the world

### **Meetup**

Connects you with locals who share your interests

### **Skyview**

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

### **Travello**

Find travel friends on the road

### **ALIX for One**

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

### **TripWhistle**

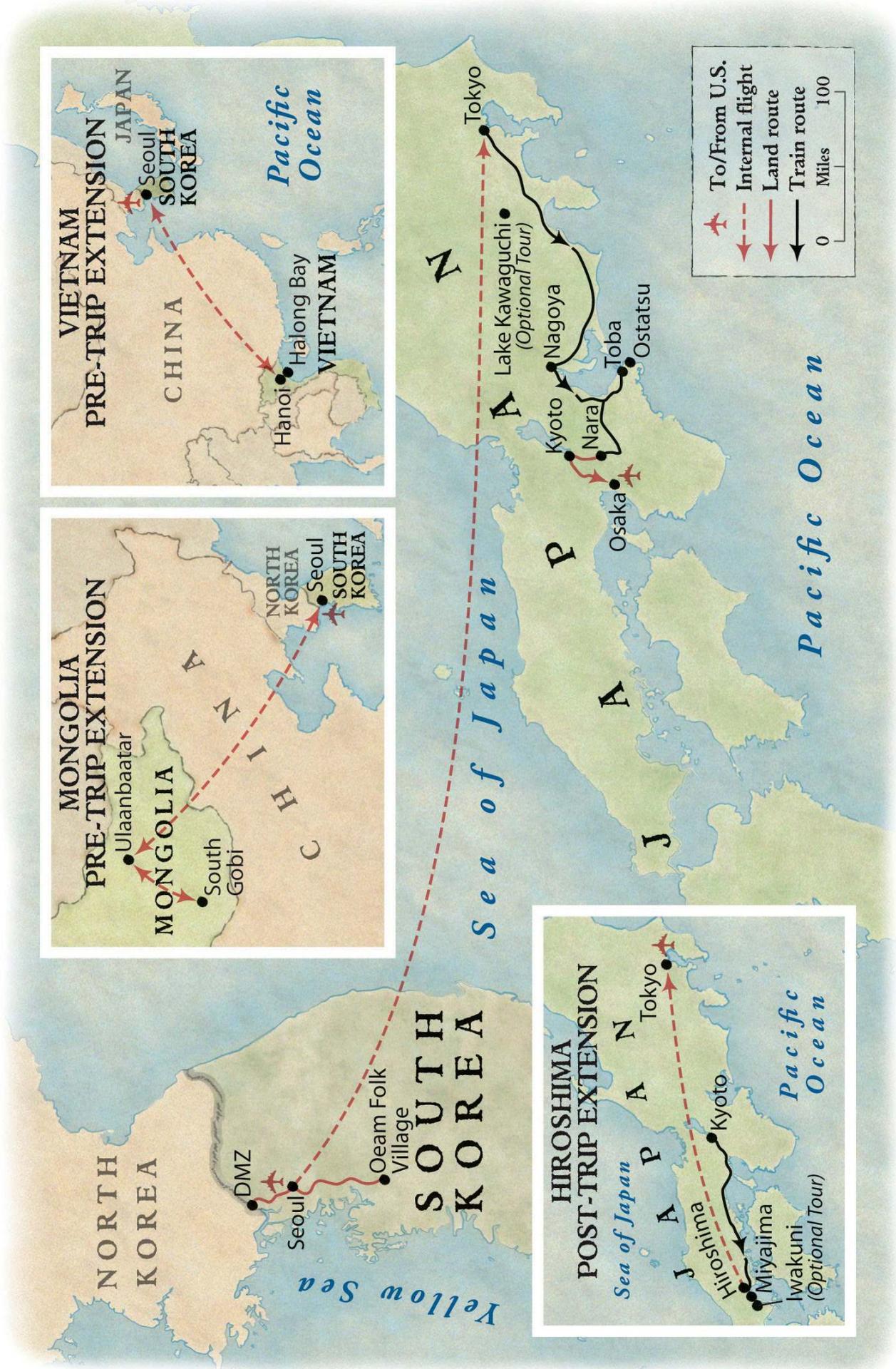
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

### **GeoSure**

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

### **Chirpey**

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



# SHARE YOUR TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

We invite you to share your videos, slideshows, and photos of your past O.A.T. adventures to help inspire your fellow travelers. Go to [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner) to upload your photos or videos, and they may be featured on our website.

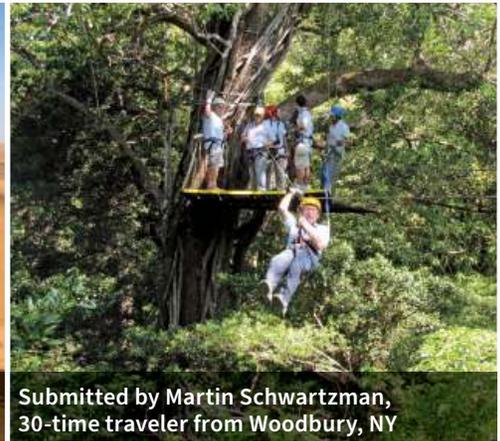
## Most Popular Videos, Slideshows & Photos from our O.A.T. Adventures Created by O.A.T. Travelers



Submitted by Joy and Don Janke,  
8-time travelers from Stevensville, MI



Submitted by Julia Schneider,  
5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,  
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler  
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler  
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,  
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



1-800-955-1925 | [www.oattravel.com](http://www.oattravel.com)

CONNECT WITH US:  



**World's Best**  
#4 Best Intimate-Ship  
Ocean Cruise Line



**Readers' Choice**  
Named to the Best  
Tour Operators list



**USA Today**  
#6 Best Educational  
Tour Companies



**"Best Tours"**  
Named one of the  
"Best Tours"