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Mongolia: Splendor on the Steppe

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Apart from the foie gras, which Strasbourg-born chef David Baruthio painstakingly taught the locals to produce, almost everything had to be imported to Mongolia's Terelj Hotel — the country's first five-star property — prior to its opening in the summer of 2008. A Canadian designer has deployed opulent European fabrics throughout. The spa's treatment rooms are inspired by Olde England, and boast a German flotation bed. You can drink Italian espresso or Irish whiskey in the cigar lounge, recline on Tibetan carpets in a *ger* (the traditional Mongolian felt-covered tent) and watch North Korean ground staff tend the impeccable greenery. [See 25 authentic Asian experiences.](#)

A 90-minute drive on well-paved roads from the capital Ulan Bator delivers guests to this globalized retreat located along the Terelj River and inside a national park. The buildings were originally a dormitory-style holiday camp for Russians, but the only remnant of that considerably less luxurious era is a towering copper sculpture of Josef Stalin — retained, presumably, for its kitsch value. Some of the accommodation has a dash of that too (the Terelj Suite is purest *Nutcracker*), but in the main the rooms are sumptuously comfortable. Heating systems are top notch — a thing of vital importance if you're going to be visiting in the chilly months. From July to September, though, the weather's balmy enough for horse-riding, trekking in the surrounding hills or salmon-fishing. Then you can head back to the hotel spa for (but of course) French therapies and Swedish massage. See tereljhotel.com for more.